

## Aromatherapy and Skin Care

by Faith Teegardin, LE

Our environment is constantly bombarding us with toxins, including but not limited to the air we breathe and the foods we eat, the containers we store our foods in, not to mention the containers they come packaged in! It's difficult to completely avoid toxins, but there seems to be a great movement now. I see more and more people avoiding plastic food containers, using glass water bottles, refusing to microwave their food or at least microwaving in safe containers. It's disappointing, however, to see that the one area in which many people continue to skimp is with their skin care products.

Our skin is our first line of defense against environmental toxins, but it will readily absorb most of what we apply to it. High quality skin care lines can be expensive, and skin care is usually one of the first things to go when the budget get tighter, as it is for many people these days.

As a licensed esthetician, it's important to me that my clients are aware and educated about the products they are using on their skin. I offer several lines of professional skin care products at my salon, but many times I hear "I just can't afford it. I will have to keep using x brand that I picked up at the grocery store." Unfortunately, x brand is likely cheaper because it's diluted and full of fillers, synthetic fragrances, and other low quality ingredients.

Quality skin care doesn't have to be expensive! What it absolutely MUST be, however, is free of fillers and toxins, and full of organic and minimally processed plant based ingredients. I prefer products that are locally produced in small batches.

This achieves two things.

- 1) It keeps your money in your local economy.
- 2) Small batches of products are typically produced by companies that are passionate about their craft, and who use high quality, natural ingredients, and avoid the use of toxic preservatives.

They're just going to be healthier and safer for you.

So let's discuss some of the ingredients you'll find in home made skin care products - more specifically, some of the popular carrier oils that are blended in to these products.

Carrier or base oils are a good option for blending because they help to stabilize volatile essential oils. They also contain nutrients that are highly beneficial for the skin. Unlike essential oils, which are obtained from the leaves, bark, roots, and other aromatic portions of a plant, carrier oils are obtained from the fatty portions of a plant: the seeds, nuts, and/or kernels. They don't impart their aroma as strongly as essential oils, and can go rancid over time.

Sweet almond oil contains vitamins A, B1, B2, B6, and E. It also contains mono- and polyunsaturated fatty acids, which aid in protecting, nourishing, softening, and lubricating the skin. It's ideal for chapped, sore, itchy or inflamed skin.

Apricot oil contains vitamin E and mono- and polyunsaturated fats. It's mild and safe for sensitive and acne-prone skin. The linoleic and oleic acids are excellent anti-inflammatories, and it is suggested to combine lavender and tea tree with apricot oil for use on acne.

Avocado oil contains vitamins A, B, D, lecithin, potassium, proteins, and fatty acids. Ideal for dry and dehydrated skin, it's also excellent for mature skin, eczema, and even diaper rash. Because of its fragrance and rich texture, it's recommended to only use 50% in a blend.

Coconut oil, one of my personal favorites, is extremely beneficial for the skin. It contains saturated fats that help to smooth the skin and prevent dehydration by eliminating moisture loss via the pores. It also contains capric, caprylic and lauric acids, which have strong antiseptic and microbial properties, which help protect the skin from infections. This makes it an excellent vaginal lubricant. Vitamin E is also found in coconut oil. This vitamin is essential for healthy skin. It also prevents premature aging and wrinkling due to its antioxidant

properties. Historically, it has been used as an anti-aging skin care product. Coconut oil is also rich in proteins, which help keep the skin healthy by contributing to cellular health and tissue repair. Best of all, unlike many carrier oils, coconut oil does not go rancid. For a luxurious body moisturizer, try whipping coconut oil to a fluffy consistency and add a few drops of your favorite essential oil. Apply after showering for soft, smooth, healthy skin!

Grapeseed oil is extracted from the muscat grape seed. Light, odorless, and easily absorbed in to the skin, it's high in polyunsaturates, vitamin E, minerals, protein, and it contains traces of the antioxidant picnogenol. This oil is suitable for all skin types.

Hazelnut oil is highly moisturizing and nourishing to the skin due to it's high vitamin, mineral, and protein content. It's slightly astringent nature makes it useful for acne sufferers, but be sure to check for nut allergies before using this oil.

Jjoba is actually a liquid wax rather than an oil. However, it's similarity to human sebum and resistance to oxidation makes it an excellent carrier. This is ideal for inflammation, psoriasis, eczema, and acne. Jjoba has been used as an antibacterial by Native Americans, preventing and treating skin infections. It's long shelf life also lends to jjoba's use as a natural preservative.

Olive oil has been used for thousands of years, and is excellent for both cooking and skin care, however it is too heavy to be considered suitable massage oil and it is only recommended to use 5-20% in a blend. It contains vitamins A and E, which account partially for olive oil's anti-aging properties. It also contains polyphenols and phytosterols that neutralize free radicals. It also contains hydroxytyrosol, a rare compound that also helps to prevent free radical damage.

In addition to blending with essential oils for aromatherapy use, these carrier oils can also be used singularly as cleansers. Since oil dissolves oil, it is an excellent makeup remover. I also recommend it for oily skin. Applying oil to the skin can help to regulate the

sebaceous glands' production of oil by signaling to the skin that there is already enough oil on the skin's surface.

To properly cleanse the face with oil, I recommend applying a quarter-sized amount of the desired oil or oil blend to dry palms. Rub palms together to warm the oil, and apply to the skin using upward motions. Massage over the entire face beginning at the neck and moving upward to the forehead. After you massage a few minutes, you may begin to notice a sandy or gritty substance under your fingers. These are comedones (plugs of sebum and dead skin cells) being released from your pores. Remember, oil breaks down oil, so the less stubborn ones will begin to loosen and slide right out of your pores. Your esthetician may still have to perform extractions during your next facial, but this will save you from the discomfort of having so many comedones for her to extract! After you have cleansed your face, use a washcloth dampened with hot water to thoroughly remove the oil from your face, again using upward motions beginning at your neck and ending at your forehead. The water must be warm because it will separate the oil molecules more effectively from your skin than cold water will. Follow with toner, serum and other treatments, and your favorite moisturizer.

It is also worth mentioning that in cases of acne treatment, many over the counter skin care products contain animal fat and can worsen acne. I highly recommend using organic carrier oils instead, as most of them possess anti-inflammatory and antiseptic properties. Most of my acne clients prefer to blend their oils with tea tree oil, and I have seen beautiful results after daily use for a week.

There are many other carrier oils suitable for aromatherapy blending and skin care, but these are a few of my favorites, and they are the ones I most often recommend to my skin care clients.

## References

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