

BOTANICAL INGREDIENTS

Found in Spa & Retail Beauty
Products



Her Zen Academy

Aloe vera

What it is: This plant originated in Africa but is now found growing in most tropical and subtropical regions of the world. It is also an excellent houseplant to keep around.

What it does: The juice from the large, succulent leaves is an excellent first-aid treatment for burns, rough or irritated skin, and wounds. (Because of its ability to seal over a wound, it should never be used on staph infections.) Aloe juice is a wonderful moisturizer that also firms and tones the skin. Though fresh aloe juice is wonderful to use in products that you'll use up in a few days, it doesn't have preservative properties. For those products that need a longer shelf life, such as creams and lotions, use aloe vera gel that has at least 1 percent citric acid added as a natural preservative; you can find commercial preparations of this type of aloe gel in most natural foods stores and pharmacies.

Beeswax

What it is: This rich honey-scented wax is made by bees to build their honeycombs.

What it does: Beeswax is one of the most popular and widely used thickeners in skin care products, found in everything from lip balms to body butters, creams, salves, and lotions. But along with thickening products, it also adds its own rich, soothing, healing, antibiotic properties — bee energy!

Most recipes call for grating beeswax, so that it melts more quickly; you can also buy beeswax granules. Be sure that the beeswax you buy is pure and unrefined. It should be golden to green in color, not white. White beeswax has been refined.

Borax

What it is: Borax, or sodium borate, is a natural mineral mined from only a few places in the world. Imagine the surprise when women discover that those lovely bath salts they love contain the same ingredient as the popular laundry soap 20 Mule Team Borax. In fact, you can use grocery-store borax in your formulas.

What it does: This mineral softens water, is a cleansing agent, and has the unique ability to suspend soap particles in water so they don't adhere to the skin or clog the pores. The skin is left cleaner and softer because of it.

Vegetable Waxes and Butters

Though beeswax is my preferred wax for a thickening agent, there are other natural waxes available. You could use candelilla wax, derived from the leaves of *Euphorbia antisyphilitica*, a tree native to the southwestern United States and Mexico, or carnauba wax, derived from the Brazilian palm *Copernicia prunifera*. Both of these waxes are good, non-animal-derived alternatives to beeswax.

You could also use any of the solid or semi-solid butters, such as **Cocoa butter** or **Coconut oil**. Illipe butter (pressed from the nuts of *Shorea stenoptera*, native to Borneo) or kokum butter (pressed from the seeds of *Garcinia indica*, native to India) may also do.

These vegetable waxes and butters differ in texture from beeswax, so if you substitute them for beeswax, you'll have to experiment to determine the right amount to use.

Clay

What it is: Clay is another one of those wonderful substances mined from the earth. It is the essence of a mountain ground down through the ages into a smooth powder, and blessed by thousands of sunrises, sunsets, wind, and rainstorms. When we use clay in our formulas, we are unleashing the energy of thousands of years.

What it does: Clay has been used for thousands of years as both a medicine and a cosmetic. It is found in products as varied as kitty litter (as a deodorizing and absorbent agent), poultices and facials (to help draw out impurities), and bath salts (to cleanse and remove impurities). There are many types. All are drawing, drying, and mineral rich. The concentrations of the various minerals are what determine the color and different effects of the clay. But when one clay isn't available, another clay will do.

Bentonite

This softer, more mucilaginous clay has mild properties good for most skin problems. Bentonite is also taken internally as a mineral supplement. It aids in binding toxic minerals, making them insoluble, so they can be more easily eliminated.

Green Clay

High concentrations of minerals (chromium, nickel, and copper), plant material, and volcanic matter give this clay its green coloring. It is my favorite clay for medicinal purposes, but I also find it excellent for most cosmetic purposes. It is fairly mild and can be used successfully for most skin types. However, its green color isn't appropriate for some body powders.

White Clay

This is the most versatile of all clays and the one used most often in cosmetics. Because it's milder and less drying than other clays, white clay is used in skin masks, body packs, powders, and bath salts. The white clay generally used in cosmetics is called *kaolin* and is available in natural food stores but can be purchased at a much lower price in ceramic supply stores. White clay is comprised primarily of aluminum oxide and small amounts of zinc oxide.

Red Clay

Rich in the minerals silica, magnesium, calcium, potassium, and iron, red clay sports a rusty color. It is very drying and drawing and is primarily used in medicinal preparations for poison oak/ivy, rashes, and wounds. Red clay is also useful in preparations for oily skin, acne, or other problem skin.

Flower waters (hydrosols)

What it is: Hydrosols, or flower waters, are made by steam-distilling plants. They are often the by-product of essential oil production, a recapture of the water used to steam the plant materials in order to extract their oils, but better-quality hydrosols are made on their own, not as by-products. (Make your own! See recipe for **Handmade Rose Water**.) Though they contain many of the plant's active constituents, hydrosols are far less concentrated than essential oils and so have less potential to be irritating to the skin.

What it does: Hydrosols are used as spritzers and sprays and as a base (in place of water) in many skin care products such as creams and lotions. They are wonderful used alone as refreshing facial sprays and deodorizing room sprays; they can provide a wonderful cooling mist on a hot day's drive or in a stuffy hot room. Depending on the plant being used, hydrosols can be slightly astringent or moisturizing.

Glycerin, vegetable

What it is: Glycerin is a chemical component of all fats and oils. It is a thick, emollient, soothing, and very sweet substance used in soap making, natural skin care, and medicinal products. Glycerin derived from vegetable sources — such as palm oil, soy nuts, or coconuts — is of much higher quality than glycerin from animal fats.

What it does: Glycerin is a humectant (it draws moisture from the air) and helps moisturize and soothe the skin. It also helps to smooth and detangle hair and is found in many hair care products, especially conditioners. However, though glycerin makes the hair feel smooth and look shiny, it actually coats the shaft of the hair, causing it to weaken and break. It is not recommended for long-term use on hair.

Lanolin

What it is: Lanolin is the protective oil found on the wool of sheep. It helps keep the sheep warm and makes their wool weather-resistant.

What it does: This thick, viscous substance is the oil most like our own skin oil, making it one of the best moisturizers for humans. You can buy hydrolyzed lanolin, which is odorless but heavily processed and often laden with synthetic chemicals. Though it's a bit more challenging to use, I recommend using pure lanolin, or anhydrous lanolin. Use only small amounts, as the sheep-like odor will definitely permeate everything you make.

Rose water

What it is: Pure rose water is a hydrosol (see **Flower waters**), a distillate of rose petals. It smells heavenly and tastes delicious. When purchasing rose water, be sure to buy only 100-percent pure steam-distilled rose water. Often what is available in pharmacies and even some natural food stores is water with synthetic rose oil and preservatives added. Luckily you can make your own (see **Handmade Rose Water**).

What it does: Rose water is used in cosmetics for its lovely scent, but also because it has light astringent properties. As the gentlest of all astringents, rose water is often used as toner for sensitive and dry skin. It is also relaxing and calming. It is often used for romance and love!

Vitamin E oil

What it is: This oil is pressed from seeds and nuts that have high concentrations of vitamin E. You can purchase vitamin E in liquid form or in gelatin capsules (d-alpha tocopherol and mixed tocopherols). The capsules are usually more concentrated and often of higher quality. To use, prick with a pin and squeeze the oil out.

What it does: A powerful antioxidant, vitamin E is excellent for preventing scarring, healing burns, and revitalizing aged skin. It also has good preservative properties and is often used in natural formulas to extend their shelf life.

Witch hazel extract

What it is: This old-fashioned extract is steam-distilled from the bark of the witch hazel plant, a small, shrub-like tree native to the North American continent.

What it does: Witch hazel extract is used in many cosmetic products for its light astringent and firming properties. Witch hazel also has mild antibacterial properties, making it an excellent treatment for acne and skin problems. You can make your own extract by purchasing witch hazel bark from an herb company, then soaking it in alcohol (rubbing alcohol for external purposes; brandy or vodka for internal purposes). However, I find it easier to buy it; it's available in most pharmacies and natural food stores.

Essential Oils

Essential oils are highly concentrated extracts of the potent, volatile, aromatic constituents of plants. Aromatherapy, the art and science of using essential oils for healing purposes, has been practiced for over eight thousand years and is often combined with herbal therapeutics. Essential oils are highly concentrated; it often takes hundreds of pounds of plant material to make even a few ounces of essential oil. For instance, it takes 60 pounds of roses to make one drop of rose oil, and 10 pounds of lavender to make 1 ounce of lavender oil. Because of their extreme concentration, essential oils need to be used with caution. They are recommended for external use only.

Essential oils are potent transporters of healing properties. Herbalist Stephanie Tourles, in her excellent book *Organic Body Care Recipes*, states, "I consider essential oils the life force or soul of the plant. They embody the plant's precious, aromatic hormones and chemical compounds that can regenerate and oxygenate the skin. Essential oils are important to include in therapeutic personal care formulations because, due to their minute molecular structure, they easily penetrate into the dermis to nourish, rejuvenate, and revitalize skin cells, unlike many of the heavier ingredients in face and body care products, such as base oils, waxes, and thickeners, which remain primarily on the skin's surface or penetrate only slightly beneath it."

Most essential oils will last for two to three years, and some much longer, if stored in a cool place, out of direct light. Use sparingly, and in the amounts recommended. Most essential oils should be diluted in a carrier oil before being put on the skin, though some are safe to use "neat" (directly on the skin). Don't ingest them, unless you're working with a trained aromatherapist or herbalist. And keep them out of reach of children.

I've listed here a few of my favorite essential oils to use in natural beauty products. They are generally readily available, in the inexpensive to moderately priced range, and sustainably harvested.

Essential vs. Fragrance Oils

Essential oils are *not* the same as synthetic "fragrance" oils. Though they may smell and look similar to essential oils, and they are often packaged similarly (and labeled "pure" or "natural" or "naturally made"), synthetic fragrance oils do not contain the energy of the plants; they are chemical creations manufactured in laboratories. If the label does not state "essential oil," then it is not the real thing.

While many people prefer not to use any synthetic fragrance oils in their products, I do use them occasionally. For instance, when the cost of adding a pure essential oil such as rose or jasmine to a large batch of bath salts or body powder might be prohibitive, I may use some fragrance oil. But that's purely for scent. If I am making a product where I want the oil's healing properties, I use only pure essential oils.

Cardamom

An exotic sensuous scent, cardamom is so yummy it's almost addictive. It is wonderful combined with vanilla, rose, orange, ylang ylang, and other blends. Try it in personal lubricants and your sensuous love balms!

Carrot seed

Carrot seed is an excellent healing essential oil especially indicated for sun-damaged, wrinkled, and sagging skin, but it can be used for all skin types. It adds a mild earthy scent and golden color to skin care products and is excellent blended with other oils in serums and creams for aging and mature skin.

Cedarwood

Cedarwood adds a woody, warm odor to skin care products. It is relaxing and grounding, and a good base note in blends. It's helpful for blemished skin and acne.

Cinnamon

Adds a wonderful warm and familiar scent to skin care products. It can be especially nice in lip balms, bath salts, and facial masks. But use the oil sparingly, as it is very potent and can be irritating to the skin. Or use powdered cinnamon instead.

Citrus (lemon, lime, grapefruit, and tangerine)

Citrus essential oils add a refreshing, uplifting, "clean" scent to skin care products. Most have stimulating and invigorating properties and are astringent and disinfectant. They blend well with heavier and/or very sweet scents. They can also be used in edible body care products. My favorite is grapefruit. (Note that sometimes citrus essential oils can be photosensitizing and/or lighten skin. Test on yourself in a small area before using.)

Conifers (balsam, pine, and spruce)

These oils add a refreshing, woody scent to body care products. They are generally relaxing but invigorating, and they add a fresh, clean energy.

Frankincense

A thick, resinous oil, frankincense has a rich, deep odor and calming and relaxing properties. It is used in formulas for dry and mature skin and in healing salves and balms to rejuvenate skin and accelerate healing.

Lavender

One of the most widely used and inexpensive essential oils, lavender is popular in cosmetics, skin care, and bath and laundry products. It is wonderfully calming and relaxing, as well as disinfectant. You can't go wrong using lavender. It can be used neat (directly on the skin, undiluted).

Mints (peppermint, spearmint)

Mint essential oils add an invigorating and uplifting energy to skin care products, and they are often used to flavor mouthwash and toothpaste products. They are cooling, refreshing, and energizing.

Patchouli

People seem to either love or fervently dislike patchouli essential oil. Its often associated with the '60s, as it was a favorite scent of that era; *everyone* wore it! It has a rich, musky odor that is sensuous and relaxing. Patchouli has cell-rejuvenating properties and is especially useful for mature and damaged skin.

Sandalwood

One of the most popular essential oils for centuries, used in incense, skin care products, and medicinals, sandalwood is now at risk of becoming endangered, so be sure to use only sustainably cultivated sandalwood. It has a sensuous, almost intoxicating scent that is deeply relaxing; for the skin, it offers soothing, emollient, toning properties.

Vanilla

Be prepared to have people fall in love with you when you wear the scent of vanilla. It is warm, friendly, and sensuous in a homey, familiar sort of way. It blends wonderfully with other scents. The essential oil (like the extract) is derived from the bean of the vanilla orchid, which may in part explain its sensuous nature! Use in lip balms, body butters, sensual love balms, and lubricants.

Vetiver

A warming, earth-scented oil, vetiver can be used in place of sandalwood. It is calming, relaxing, and grounding and is used to treat depression. *Great in blends!*

Ylang ylang

Ylang ylang essential oil has an intensely sweet, spicy, exotic scent that can be somewhat overpowering — but oh so captivating. The oil is extracted from a gorgeous tropical flower. It's actually quite common, so this essential oil is more reasonably priced than other richly scented floral oils such as rose and jasmine. It blends well with other essential oils.

There are many other lovely essential oils that are wonderful to experience and experiment with in your homemade products. Oils such as rose, jasmine, neroli, and helichrysum are exquisite, but usually quite expensive. You might wish to practice with some of the less expensive essential oils, perfecting your formulas, before experimenting with some of the more costly ones.

Carrier or Base Oils

Carrier or base oils, pressed from the fruits, seeds, or nuts of various plants, serve as the base of many skin care products. They are sometimes called "fixed" oils because they are not volatile, as essential oils are. Each oil has different properties, but all protect the skin. The best ones are those that have been minimally processed. Look for oils whose labels state that they are "unrefined," "cold pressed," or "expeller expressed" — and of course organic, if available. These plant-based oils generally have a short shelf life and are best stored in the refrigerator or in a cool pantry out of direct sunlight. Learn to recognize the smell of rancid oil — it has a strong "off" odor — and don't use an oil if you suspect it may be rancid.

The base or carrier oils you use will make a big difference in your products, so choose those that are best suited to your skin type (and wallet!). While there are hundreds of different kinds of carrier oils available these days, here are my favorites.

Almond oil

What it is: Extracted from the kernels of almonds, this sweet oil is one of the most versatile for skin care products.

What it does: Almond oil is light, rich in fatty acids, and beneficial to most skin types. It has a light, pleasant odor and soothes, softens, and reconditions the skin.

Apricot kernel oil

What it is: Cold-pressed from apricot pits, this oil is a versatile moisturizer.

What it does: One of my favorite carrier oils, apricot kernel oil is light, has a non-oily feel, and is good for most skin types. It is especially suited for sensitive and mature skin. It has a light, pleasant odor.

Argan oil

What it is: Argan oil is extracted from the nut of the argan tree, a small tree found growing in the Moroccan high desert. Until very recently the oil was seldom found outside the region where the tree grows, and the tree itself was endangered due to overgrazing by goats. Due to the hard work of women's collectives in Morocco, the nut is now sustainably grown and harvested, and the oil is exported as a "miracle" skin care product.

What it does: Rich in natural tocopherols, squalene, and fatty acids, the oil is reported to heal scar tissue, soften skin, and reduce fine lines and wrinkles. It is absorbed quickly into the skin and is used as a conditioner and treatment for the hands, face, hair, and nails. But it is expensive and can be difficult to find. Though I'm happy for the women's cooperatives in Morocco, and for the argan trees that are being preserved now that they are seen as economically beneficial, frankly I think the oil is a little overrated.

Avocado oil

What it is: This rich, buttery oil is expressed from the fruit and nut of the avocado. It is light to dark green in color.

What it does: A very nutritive oil, with high levels of vitamins A, D, and E, avocado oil is especially good for dry, mature, and aging skin. Because it is thick and emollient, it doesn't penetrate the skin as readily as lighter oils and isn't recommended for oily skin types. It is skin protective and helps keep moisture in the skin.

Castor oil

What it is: This viscous oil is extracted from the beans of the castor plant. Though not used for cooking, it has an excellent reputation as a medicinal oil.

What it does: Castor oil is perhaps best known for its purgative properties, but it is also excellent for skin care. It is often used in compresses to help dissolve cysts and tumors. It is highly emollient, soothing, thick, and viscous, and it is good for dry and mature skin, and especially for eczema, psoriasis, and those rough areas around the heels and elbows.

Cocoa butter

What it is: Cocoa butter is the fat surrounding the cacao bean, from which chocolate is made. No wonder it smells heavenly; in fact, everything made with it has the potential to smell deliciously like chocolate — though this may not always be desirable in your products! It is thick and solid at room temperature.

What it does: Cocoa butter is one of the richest oils available, so use it sparingly in formulas intended for oily skin! On the other hand, cocoa butter is excellent for dry, mature skin. It's also excellent (and delicious) in personal lubricants. Along with its emollient properties, it will help thicken body care products. (Small tapioca-like kernels in your cream are an indication that you've added too much cocoa butter to your base.)

Coconut oil

What it is: Coconut oil is pressed from the milky pulp of the coconut. It is a semisolid oil that liquefies at temperatures above 75°F (24°C). Long treasured for its protective emollient properties, today coconut oil is probably the most common oil used for cosmetic purposes.

What it does: Coconut oil is a rich emollient with a sweet fragrant odor. Not as thick or fatty as cocoa butter, this oil is more suitable for most skin types and is a wonderful carrier oil in many skin care products. It is commonly used as a moisturizer for skin and a conditioner for hair. It is also delicious in lip balms, body butters, and lubricants.

Grapeseed oil

What it is: This light green, liquid oil is one of the lightest you can use in skin care products. It is expressed from the seeds of grapes, usually as a by-product of the wine industry. Use organically cultivated grapeseed oil whenever possible, as grapes are usually heavily sprayed with herbicides.

What it does: Considered a "non-oily" oil, grapeseed oil is light, non-greasy, quickly absorbed by the skin, and odorless. It's perfect for oily skin; it's one of my favorites for skin care products for teenagers, who tend to have oily skin.

Jojoba oil

What it is: Jojoba "oil" is expressed from the nuts of a small shrub that grows in the high desert of the American Southwest. Jojoba is technically not an oil but a liquid wax ester, similar in structure to our own moisturizing sebum. Because of its natural antioxidant properties, it keeps for a long time and requires no refrigeration.

What it does: Jojoba is one of the most highly prized carrier oils in natural skin care products because of its similarity to human sebum and its ability to moisturize the skin. Use for all skin types. It is popular in creams, massage oils, lip balms, skin salves, and hair care formulas.

Kukui nut oil

What it is: This rich emollient oil is pressed from the small nuts of the kukui or candlenut tree (*Aleurites moluccana*), the state tree of Hawaii.

What it does: Rich in linoleic and alpha-linoleic acids and essential fatty acids, with soothing emollient properties, kukui nut oil is especially healing for the skin. It is readily absorbed and is good for dry skin, eczema, and psoriasis. It is also often used in lip balms, body butters, and lubricants.

Macadamia nut oil

What it is: This richly scented emollient oil is expressed from the seeds of the macadamia nut.

What it does: Like jojoba oil, macadamia nut oil closely resembles human sebum, and because of this it is readily and easily absorbed into the skin. It is skin protective, healing, and soothing, and is especially recommended for healing damaged and scarred skin. It is also deliciously tasty and smells wonderfully nutty, and it makes a wonderful addition to edible body butters, lubricants, and lip balms. This is one of my favorite oils for both cooking and skin care formulas, perhaps because I have a slight addiction to the oil-rich nuts!

Olive oil

What it is: "Liquid gold of the Mediterranean!" Homer declared. The nutrient-rich oil pressed from olives is one of the most widely used and highly prized oils in the world. The oil is pressed from both unripe (green olive oil) and ripe (golden-colored olive oil) olives. Either can be used, but beware of quality! Olive oil comes in several grades: "extra virgin" denotes the first pressing and the highest-quality oil; "virgin" denotes the second pressing; the third pressing is labeled simply "olive oil" and is definitely not as good quality as extra virgin and virgin oils.

What it does: Delicious, nutrient-dense, and rich, good quality olive oil is heart healthy and good for most skin types. It tends to be thick and heavy and is better for dry and more mature skin. It's difficult to mask the rich olive odor, which however delicious it may be on salads and culinary delights is not so pleasing in skin care products. Because of this, olive oil is often diluted with other oils for cosmetic purposes.

Rosehip seed oil

What it is: Pressed from the seeds or "hips" of roses, especially the *Rosa rubiginosa* and other wild roses found growing in various places around the world. Much of today's commercial rosehip seed oil is coming from South American countries and is of good quality. However, it is very sensitive to heat and should be stored in the refrigerator.

What it does: A rich, pale red oil, rosehip seed oil has high levels of essential fatty acids and is exceptionally healing for damaged, dry, or prematurely aged skin. It is considered a superior skin care oil and is used for revitalizing tired or problem skin and aids in cell regeneration.

Sea buckthorn oil

What it is: This bright orange oil is pressed from the berries of *Hippophae rhamnoides*.

What it does: Sea buckthorn oil is rich in essential fatty acids, carotenes, and tocopherols, nutrients that nourish and feed the skin. It is highly prized for use in cases of damaged skin, scar tissue, prematurely aged skin, wrinkles, and burns.

Sesame seed oil

What it is: Pressed from oil-rich sesame seeds, this oil is a favorite in Ayurvedic practices and for healing massages. It is often referred to as the "queen of oils."

What it does: Sesame seed oil is very nutritive, with high levels of antioxidants, vitamins A and E, and protein. This light, penetrating oil makes a nice base for many skin care products and is commonly used in creams, massage oil, and lip balms. It is often used in natural sunscreen recipes because of its sun-protective properties.

Shea butter

What it is: Extracted from the nuts of the karite tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*, syn. *Butyrospermum parkii*), shea butter is a semisolid yellow oil. The scent is fairly strong in its pure form. For cosmetic purposes most people prefer the "refined" butter, which is a fractionated by-product made by pressing shea butter.

What it does: This rich butter is used for healing damaged or scarred skin, as well as dry skin and rough skin (such as on the elbows, knees, and heels). It is also a protective agent in harsh weather. Shea butter takes longer to harden than other butters, so when making products with it, allow a longer cooling period.

Herbs for Natural Beauty

Following is a small sampling of some of the most popular herbs used for natural skin care and skin care products. There are so many herbs to choose from! Start in your garden — see what's growing there. Or browse herb catalogs to see what's available. Next, look up the properties of the plants you're thinking about using in a good herb reference book. Look for those plants that are best suited for your skin type and for the products you wish to make.

Calendula
Calendula officinalis

Part used: flowers

What it does: The bright yellow to orange flower of calendula is renowned for its skin-healing properties. Calendula has antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties, making it especially healing for wounds, burns, and damaged or problem skin. It is gentle enough for all skin types. The lovely, soothing, golden oil made from the petals is often used in lotions, creams, salves, and lip balms. A strong infusion is used for brightening golden and strawberry red highlights. Because of its gentleness, calendula is a favorite herb in infant and children skin care products.

Chamomile

Matricaria recutita, Anthemis nobilis

Part used: flowers

What it does: Chamomile is among the most beloved and widely used herbs. Safe, gentle, and effective, chamomile has powerful anti-inflammatory properties and is commonly used to treat inflamed, irritated, or sensitive skin. It is good for all skin types but is especially indicated for sensitive skin. It's often combined with calendula and used in skin care products for infants and children. The flowers make a wonderful rinse for light hair, adding sheen and golden highlights when used over a period of time. Chamomile has mild nervine properties and is used in herbal baths for its relaxing and calming effects. *Note:* Some people have allergies to the Compositae family, to which chamomile belongs; avoid chamomile if you find that it gives you itchy eyes, sore throat, or skin irritation.

Comfrey
Symphytum officinale

Part used: leaves

What it does: A very soothing emollient herb, comfrey is renowned for its ability to rejuvenate the skin and support regeneration of skin tissue. It is excellent for irritated, inflamed, and damaged skin, but gentle enough for all skin types. Comfrey is rich in mucilaginous material and aids in moisturizing and "softening" the skin. It is excellent in skin care products for infants and children. *Note:* There is some concern about using comfrey on deep open wounds, as it's possible to heal the outer skin before the deeper tissue has a chance to heal.

Elder

Sambucus canadensis, S. nigra

Part used: flowers

What it does: Elder flowers were the favorite cosmetic aid of many of our grandmothers and great-grandmothers, who used them in a wash to "brighten" the skin. Elder flower has soothing, anti-inflammatory, and mild astringent properties that make it excellent for damaged, irritated skin. But it is gentle enough for all skin types and is often included in skin care formulas for the elderly as well as for infants and children. Elder flower water makes a wonderful rinse for lighter hair colors.

Lavender
Lavandula spp.

Part used: flowers

What it does: One of our most familiar and favorite herbs, lavender adds its clean floral scent and calm, relaxing properties to hundreds, if not thousands, of different skin care products, herb formulas, and cleansing agents. Lavender's antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties make it useful for burns, rashes, and irritated and damaged skin, and it is commonly used as a healing agent in creams, lotions, and salves. It has cell-regenerating properties and is used for reducing wrinkles, scarring, and stretch marks. It is also an excellent calming and relaxing herb and is popular in herbal baths. *Note:* There are many different varieties of lavender, but *Lavandula angustifolia* is generally considered the best quality for medicinal and cosmetic purposes.

Lemon balm
Melissa officinalis

Part used: leaves

What it does: With its fragrant lemon-like scent and wonderfully refreshing flavor, lemon balm is beloved by herbalists, cosmeticians, and beekeepers alike. It is a favorite nervine herb, being both relaxing and uplifting, and it is often used to brighten the spirits when a person is feeling down. It has powerful antimicrobial and antiviral properties and is one of our best aids for reducing outbreaks of herpes and other viruses. It is a light astringent and is especially nice to use in skin care products for people who have acne or other problem skin, but it is gentle enough for all skin types.

Rose
Rosa spp.

Parts used: flowers and hips

What it does: Quite truthfully, you need have no other herb for skin care products than the exquisite rose. Sappho christened it the "Queen of Flowers" in 600 bce, and it still holds its royal reign. Loved not only for its fragrance but also for its gently persuasive way with skin, rose seems to nourish, balance, reform, de-scar, and rejuvenate most skin types. It is lightly astringent, but not drying. It is a known cell regenerator and is especially helpful for damaged or mature and aging skin. Rose also lifts the spirits and is used for depression and grief. It also has a long association with love and romance and is used as an aphrodisiac.

Rosemary
Rosmarinus officinalis

Part used: leaves

What it does: A wonderful herb prized for both cosmetic and medicinal purposes, rosemary is astringent, antiseptic, cleansing, and normalizing for the skin. It aids circulation, has stimulating properties, and helps bring blood flow to the surface of the skin, helping to cleanse and nourish the skin from the inside out. Because of its astringent properties, it is especially useful for oily to normal skin types. Rosemary is also a popular hair rinse, adding highlights to darker shades of hair, and can be used for dandruff control. It is a powerful antioxidant and can combat free radical damage in the body, as well as oxidation in creams, lotions, and other skin care products.

Sage
Salvia officinalis

Part used: leaves

What it does: A favorite herb for herbal first aid and skin care products, sage has been valued since medieval times. With its astringent properties, it is especially valuable for those with oily or combination skin. Sage makes an effective deodorant and is used in body powders, natural deodorants, and bath salts and scrubs for its cleansing and "grounding" effect. Sage is excellent in hair rinses and tonics, especially for darker shades of hair, and is said to accelerate and encourage hair growth.