



MANY OF THE INGREDIENTS WE CURRENTLY use in spa treatments originated from ancient civilizations and foreign cultures. Egyptians were known for their ornate beauty rituals. Both men and women were obsessed with beauty, hygiene and the use of fragrance.

In today's skin care and spa industry, alpha hydroxy acids (AHAs) are used in a multitude of beauty products. Cleopatra is a prominent historical figure known to have used such acids. She is said to have discovered the skin-softening benefits of milk baths, which contain lactic acid. Cleopatra traveled from Egypt to the shores of the Dead Sea, where she built her own version of a spa. She chose the location because of her strong belief in the healing qualities of the miraculous body of water. Her devotion may have been the inspiration for the Dead Sea phenomenon seen in spas today.

In our constant search for unique ingredients, we found several that have been used for centuries, some that are completely new and exciting to us and a few that are blatantly bizarre.

What goes around comes around

Ancient African women used natural oils including sweet almond, baobab, marula and moringa; and botanicals such as aloe, frankincense, myrrh and rose oil to nourish their skin. They also used honey, along with other natural emollients such as cocoa butter and avocado. All of these healing ingredients are still used today.

Botanical oils are unique because they treat not only the skin but the body as a whole. Researchers have discovered that ancient cultures used aromatic oils as sun protection,

deodorant and for treating skin problems and preserving bodies after death. **Myrrh** was especially popular with Egyptians of the highest social status; it was utilized as a fragrance, incense, disinfectant and mouthwash. Myrrh is still included as an ingredient in many spa formulations today.

Some scientists believe honey was used in the ancient embalming process. Today, honey is used in many skin care products as a humectant. **Manuka honey** is a luxurious variety of the sweet substance from New Zealand. It is extremely rich in antioxidants with powerful antibacterial properties, making it a strong ingredient with wound-healing and anti-aging properties.

Turmeric, an ancient powdered spice in the ginger family, offers a wide range of therapeutic and cosmetic uses. A natural antiseptic with antibacterial and antimicrobial properties, turmeric has been used for centuries in southeast Asia and India for medicinal purposes. It is used today to treat a wide variety of skin disorders, including eczema and acne.

Adzuki bean powder, a type of red bean, has been used in Japanese skin care regimens for centuries. The bean is finely milled into a soft powder that gently exfoliates the skin without damaging the surface. It can be found mixed with rice bran, mineral-rich clays, powdered sea vegetables and herbs.

Neem powder is popular for its antibacterial properties. Neem leaves have been used for centuries to make antibacterial washes and poultices. The powder is often used in conjunction with other ingredients to increase its antibacterial effectiveness. ➔

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AROUND THE WORLD

UNIQUE AND
UNUSUAL
INGREDIENTS

BY SHERRY TAYLOR AND LINDA RAE

While searching for unique ingredients, we have discovered several that have been used for centuries, some that are new and a few that are blatantly bizarre.

Siberian ginseng extract, when applied to the skin in a cosmetic vehicle, is said to form a film that immediately tightens and smoothes skin, reducing the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles. In 2009, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned the use of the term "Siberian ginseng" because the variety is not considered a true ginseng, although it does exhibit many of the same properties. Ginseng powder is said to reduce inflammation, stimulate cell growth, extend cellular life span and heal minor skin damage.

Shea butter comes from the nuts of the karite tree, which grows wild along the rivers and within rainforests of West Africa. Shea butter has been used to protect the skin as a dietary component for thousands of years. It is rich in essential fatty acids and contains large concentrations of naturally occurring retinol.

Wakame kelp is a sea algae found in the waters around Japan. Loaded with vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, the Japanese value it because of its anti-aging properties, reducing wrinkles and the appearance of under-eye dark circles.

Into the future

Ozonated oxygen is created when ozone (O₃) is infused into squalene (an organic compound derived from the olive). "Ozone is the most therapeutic, non-chemically derived form of oxygen," states Christina Church, the owner of Skin Fitness Therapy. "It increases circulation, oxygenates the cells, conditions and tones the skin and reduces inflammation."

Another relatively new ingredient to the U.S. market, **Fiflow®**, contains fully fluorinated perfluorocarbons (PFC), which have a capacity to carry gases, notably oxygen, nitrogen and carbon dioxide. "It mimics the function of hemoglobin and shuttles gasses to and from the skin," states Barbara Schumann, esthetician and CEO of Touché Beauty. "When used in the right formulaic balance with other contributing ingredients, the results are immediate, integral and long lasting." The developer of Fiflow claims that it promotes wound healing and relaxes the muscles that cause expression lines.

Cynergy TK™ is a natural bioactive keratin that has demonstrated the capability to both reverse the effects of aging skin and also protect it against future damage, according to its New Zealand-based developer. Cynergy TK™ is also said to improve the brightness and radiance of the skin, reduce fine lines and wrinkles, promote elasticity and firmness, retain moisture and reduce redness. The keratin is safely obtained from the wool of New Zealand sheep.

Off the wall

Nightingale poop has been used in Japanese skin treatments for centuries. Reuters states that the ingredient was popular in the 18th century with Geisha girls and Kabuki actors who used the bird feces to remove heavy white makeup, while simultaneously keeping their skin smooth and protected. The sanitized bird feces are mixed with white clay and applied as a mask when used for facial treatments. Apparently it is safe, since the feces is supposed to be thoroughly purified and treated under ultraviolet light to remove bacteria before its application. It is believed to be the enzymes, specifically guanine, an amino acid that occurs in nightingale feces, that helps brighten and heal sun-damaged skin.

Snail slime, specifically the slime of the Chilean *Helix Aspersa Muller* snail, is a thick, *continues*



gooey fluid gathered from live snails. Published studies claim that it stimulates fibroblast activity, boosting the production of elastin and collagen, and is instrumental in increasing the skin's ability to retain water. The discovery of this ingredient occurred accidentally when Chilean snail farmers supplying the French gourmet market noticed that they had softer skin and experienced rapid healing of minor cuts and bruises after handling the snails.

Snake venom, which is known to paralyze muscles, is found in face creams and serums to help smooth out wrinkles.

A manufacturer in China claims that **bee mucus** has properties that are helpful in removing and preventing wrinkles and balancing the skin's natural oils. However, few details and scientific results are available on bee mucus at this time.

In Denmark, a new skin lotion containing **bovine colostrum** has been developed. It is said to be excellent for both dry and sensitive skin, given its high level of enzymes and vitamins.

In Norway, there is a popular cream that contains a crystal extracted from **human seminal fluid**, which is said to be 30 times stronger than vitamin E.

Placenta extract, derived from the placenta of postpartum cows, is said to rejuvenate skin, improve the skin's oxygen absorption and thereby boost cellular metabolism by increasing cellular turnover.

Whale vomit is often found washed up on the beaches of South America and Australia. Labeled as "Ambergris" in beauty products, it has a sweet, earthy odor and is used in perfumes.

The fountain of youth and perfection

The search for youthful, flawless skin is a never-ending journey. From the beginning of humankind, we have been obsessed with our appearances, always searching for perfection. Commonly used ingredients have come in and out of favor, futuristic ingredients are being bioengineered, and along the way some very unlikely—and sometimes strange—sources are continuously discovered.

Would Cleopatra have been shocked by the bizarre ingredients discussed here? In all likelihood, she would be the first one in line to try them! Our personal advice, however, is to take a wait-and-see approach until more information and research become available.



When purchasing products for professional use and retail, make sure to check out the ingredients. Do not be afraid to ask the manufacturer about the scientific research behind their claims. Remain objective—do not allow yourself to be taken in by hype. Choose ingredients that provide results while ensuring clients' safety. ■

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