

# HERBS FOR HEALTHY SKIN



**Cindy L A Jones, Ph.D.**

# **Herbs for Healthy Skin**

**Cindy L A Jones, PhD**

**a Mushroom eBooks sampler**

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Please note:

This is a sampler of Herbs for Healthy Skin which contains only a selection of pages from those listed in the Table of Contents.

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## **Important note**

**This book is intended for educational purposes only and not as a recommendation of a cure for any disease. Nor are these remedies meant to be a substitute for professional medical care or treatment. If a serious health problem is present, the author recommends seeking the advice of a qualified health care professional. The author and publisher disclaim any liability in connection with the uses of this information.**

# Introduction

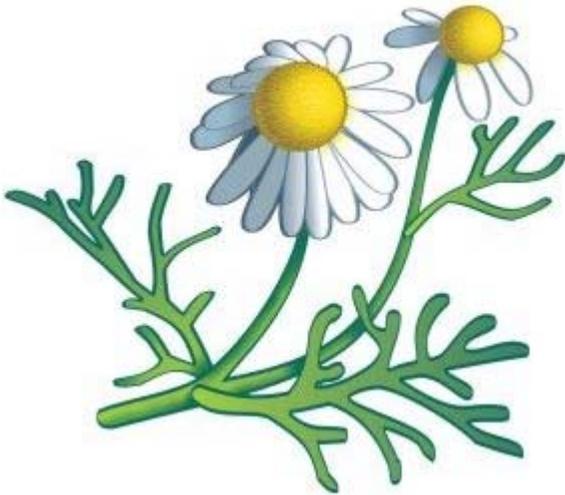
Skin care today is big business. If you peruse the cosmetics section of your department store you can easily become overwhelmed, not only with the choices offered, but also with the prices. Americans spend 45 billion dollars annually on cosmetics and 6,000 to 10,000 new products are introduced every year. Making cosmetics out of simple ingredients found in the kitchen and garden was once an art known to most women. You still can make your own skin care products though, and have fun doing it! The quality of the products you make will be far superior to the most expensive products found at the cosmetics counter, because you control the quality.

Keeping your skin healthy not only improves its appearance, but also is necessary for proper functioning of your skin. Important herbs to use for skin care include, but are not limited to, chamomile, fennel, lavender, lemon balm, pot marigold, red clover, rose, sage and thyme. These are all easy to grow herbs for the home gardener. If you don't have the room or the inclination to grow herbs, they are also readily available at health food stores.

# The Herbs

# Chamomile

*Matricaria recutita* and *Chamaemelum nobile*



## ***Growth***

There are many different plants that have been called chamomile, also spelled “camomile”, but the most common are German chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) and Roman chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*). Chamomiles will grow in almost any soil but typically prefer dry, sandy soil. Full sun is needed to produce abundant flowers, the part of the plant that is used medicinally. While German chamomile grows to be 2-3 feet tall, Roman chamomile is low growing, and often used as a ground cover. The leaves are fine and featherlike.

## *Usage*

Chamomile is commonly used in teas and potpourri. It has anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antispasmodic, sedative, aromatic and soothing qualities that make it ideal for use on the skin. Chamomile is generally considered to be a very safe herb to use, even for children, although some people do experience allergic reactions from chamomile.

Because it is both antimicrobial *and* anti-inflammatory, it is useful in treating skin inflammations including eczema, psoriasis and even diaper rash. Extracts of chamomile can also speed the healing of wounds on the skin. Chamomile is mild and gentle enough to use routinely on the skin to prevent infection and inflammation. Chamomile is found in many over-the-counter skin ointments, or you can make your own chamomile balm.

# Treating Skin Problems

# Acne

Acne is often treated with antibiotics, but there are less severe ways to treat acne. It is important to keep the face clean and free of excess oil. Soap is probably the best tool for this, but use a vinegar-based toner afterwards to restore the natural protective acid layer of the skin. Suggested herbs to use for acne include lavender, red clover, sage, lemon balm, tansy, clary sage, and strawberry leaves. These herbs can help dry the skin and reduce excess oil. Wash the skin using a tea made from one of these herbs or use the herbs to make a vinegar toner.

Tea tree oil has significant antiseptic and disinfectant properties and has been shown to improve acne. You can use a commercial product (most of which contain 5% tea tree oil) or make your own by adding tea tree oil to a balm recipe. If necessary, tea tree oil can be applied full strength, directly to the acne lesions, but stop if the skin feels irritated. Other essential oils that may have a more acceptable smell and be easier to use include bergamot, chamomile, lavender, thyme, rosemary or myrrh. Except for lavender, these oils need to be diluted to a 5% solution in water. To do this, add 15 drops of oil to about a tablespoon of water and wipe the face with a soaked cotton ball.

# Aging Skin

Aging is a normal process that is speeded up with excessive exposure to the sun. This more rapid aging of the skin is termed photoaging and can result in deep wrinkles and furrows. During aging, division of the cells of the epidermis slows down. Thus turnover of skin cells slows and cell repair takes longer. More water is lost so the skin becomes dry and cracks. Skin color may turn sallow. As if this wasn't enough, the skin becomes thinner causing fine wrinkles and even changing the facial contour. Changes in pigmentation, called age spots, are also common.

Keeping the skin well moisturized is the most important way to protect aging skin. Do not use any harsh cleansers on the skin. After washing the skin, just pat dry without rubbing and immediately apply a barrier type of moisturizer to the skin. Almond oil with your favorite essential oil added to it is a great barrier that keeps moisture in the skin. Good essential oils for aging skin include rose geranium, chamomile and ylang-ylang.

Four important herbs for aging skin are rose, red clover, Lady's mantle and fennel. The recipes in this book for rose water and herbal toner as well as the moisturizing cream are very appropriate for aging skin as well.

### ***Fennel Facial Vinegar***

1 cup vinegar

½ cup fennel

½ cup Lady's mantle

Place the herbs and vinegar together in a jar. Cover and leave for 2-3 weeks, shaking daily. Strain the herbs out of the vinegar and store in a clean bottle. Dilute the vinegar with 6 parts of clean distilled or spring water before using. This vinegar is slightly astringent and invigorating and can temporarily remove fine wrinkles.

Collagen is a large protein molecule under the skin that gives the skin integrity. Although many cosmetic products hail collagen applications as a remedy for wrinkles, collagen is too large to seep under the skin where it is needed. However, since vitamin C is necessary for the formation of collagen, making sure you get enough vitamin C can help increase collagen levels. Rose hips are a good source of vitamin C and can be used internally as tea or externally to wash the face.

# Anthrax, Cutaneous

Anthrax is one of the oldest diseases we know of. It has been a cause of death in grazing animals such as cows for thousands of years even though the bacteria that causes it was not identified until 1877. Because the organism that causes anthrax, *Bacillus anthracis*, lives in the soil, outbreaks in animals are not uncommon and can be spread easily from the blood of an infected animal. Occasionally infection can be passed on to humans, often to those who work with infected animals, their hides, or their wool, which has given it the common name, ‘weavers’ disease. Widespread immunization of animals has greatly diminished the occurrence of this disease. Now, however, anthrax has become a tool for terrorist attacks, causing anxiety in many people. Because knowledge is power, knowing how to treat anthrax, especially in the event of panic and the unavailability of antibiotics, is important.

There are three types of anthrax: pulmonary, cutaneous and gastrointestinal. Pulmonary is by far the most dangerous, but also the most difficult to contract. Inhaling the spores of the bacterium, which settle deep into the lungs, causes pulmonary anthrax. Once in the lungs the bacteria multiply and produce their toxin. The gastrointestinal type is transmitted from eating meat infected with anthrax.

Cutaneous anthrax is the most common type and is an infection of the skin that is rarely fatal. It is caused when the bacteria that cause anthrax enter the skin through cuts or abrasions. The name anthrax comes from the Greek word for coal and refers to the black color of the infected areas. The

characteristics of a cutaneous or skin anthrax infection include painless blisters that usually appear 3-5 days after exposure to the bacteria. The centers of these blisters become black and depressed and then dry out. Anthrax sores can often go unnoticed because they typically do not cause pain. Although most cases of skin anthrax improve with no complications, treatment should be given because of the seriousness of the disease if it worsens.

Keeping the skin healthy and intact is the best protection against cutaneous anthrax, just as it is against any skin disease. If you think you may have been exposed to anthrax, wash your hands with soap and water for at least 30 seconds. If you notice cuts or abrasions in the skin, treat them immediately by applying an antibiotic herb or ointment.

Because of the danger involved in doing anthrax research, we know little of agents that affect and kill the anthrax bacteria. Common antibiotics such as penicillin, tetracycline and the newer ciprofloxacin, or Cipro, are effective against anthrax. Older medical literature gives us some more natural answers. Garlic is one herb that has shown antibacterial activity against the anthrax bacteria. In *A Modern Herbal* published in 1931, M. Grieve indicated that garlic was a treatment for anthrax in animals. Newer literature also indicates that garlic is effective against very closely related *Bacillus* bacteria. Garlic is also beneficial in stimulating the immune system, which in itself is an important protection against anthrax.

Many essential oils have strong antibacterial properties. Some of the most potent are thyme and oregano oil, which contain carvacrol. Thyme, oregano and rosemary essential oils have documented activity against similar bacteria in the *Bacillus* genus. Any of these oils can be diluted to a 5% (or higher) solution in water and used to cleanse the infected skin. Essential oils are generally considered too strong to take internally, but Dr. Jean Valnet, in *The Practice of Aromather-*

*apy*, suggests taking thyme essential oil at 3-5 drops diluted in a glass of water three times daily to treat infections.

You may have heard the story of the four thieves who plundered graves of those who died from the plague (*Yersinia pestis*) in France during the 1720's. To keep from getting the plague themselves they bathed in what is now called Four Thieves Vinegar. The recipe for this vinegar is similar to the following:

### ***Four Thieves Vinegar***

1 tablespoon dried lavender  
1 tablespoon dried rosemary  
1 tablespoon dried sage  
1 tablespoon dried rue  
1 tablespoon dried wormwood  
1 tablespoon dried peppermint  
2-4 cloves of garlic  
2½ cups cider vinegar

Mix together and leave for two weeks to infuse, and then strain. Use liberally for washing.

All of the ingredients of this mixture have antibiotic properties and so it is likely that this did provide some protection for the thieves. This vinegar, or a similar recipe using whatever antibiotic herbs you have on hand, could also be used on the skin to prevent many types of infection. If taken internally, however, the rue and wormwood should be left out, as they are toxic. Rue should especially not be used by pregnant women.

W. L. Lewis reported in "Ellingwood's Therapeutist", in 1907, that he was able to treat a patient with anthrax using Echinacea. The patient was treated with one teaspoonful of Echinacea extract every four hours and eventually recovered,

# Recipes

# Steam Facial

The simplest way to use herbs for your skin is in the form of a facial steam. Facial steams are useful for opening the pores, cleansing the skin, removing toxins and improving the circulation. It is good to do a facial steam once a week, but first remove all makeup by cleansing the skin.

1 tablespoon chamomile

1 tablespoon fennel

1 tablespoon rose petals

1 tablespoon calendula (for dry skin – substitute lemon balm for oily skin)

Place herbs in a bowl and pour one quart of boiling water over them. Tie back your hair, put your face 10-12 inches over the bowl, then make a tent over your head with a towel to keep in the steam. Close your eyes and remain this way for 10 minutes or so letting the herbal steam penetrate your skin. Afterward, rinse your face with cool water. You can finish off using sage tea or sage vinegar to tighten the pores. In the winter, inhale steam from marjoram and sage to relieve cold symptoms.

## About the Author

Cindy Jones earned her Ph.D. in biochemistry and works as a medical writer, consultant and educator. She is the founder of Sagescript Herbs and Communications, specializing in the evidence-based use of herbs in medicine and has written numerous magazine articles as well as educational materials for physicians and the pharmaceutical industry. She was a contributing writer and editor to "The Herbal Drugstore" by Linda B. White and Steven Foster. "The Antibiotic Alternative," was published in 2000. Dr. Jones teaches physiology and biochemistry at local universities as well as herb classes for continuing education programs. She lives in Denver, Colorado where she tends her herb garden, husband and two sons.