



natural skincare



what is it?

It's about sustainable, non-toxic ways to look after the outside of your body – moisturisers, lip balms, creams, lotions, gels, conditioners etc. Every culture has had its own fats / oils / waxes to protect the skin from the elements. In Mediterranean lands it was olive oil; the native Americans used jojoba; the Inuit, whale and seal blubber; and in northern Europe, animal fats. These were, of course, very raw materials indeed. Nowadays, understandably, people prefer products that feel, smell and look a bit nicer.

'Natural' is difficult to define – as soon as corporations start using the word, it's time to get very sceptical. And crude oil is perfectly natural (and organic) – so the 'natural' tab could be applied to petroleum products. So what we really mean is as eco- and human-friendly as possible.

The skin is the body's largest organ. It allows toxins out and vitamins in (e.g. vitamin D from sunlight). So you have to be careful that what you put on it doesn't stop those processes.

Natural products provide an alternative to mainstream commercial ones. Their ingredients are usually plant-based – e.g. essential oils, detergents from coconuts, veg oils for creams and flower waters for gels; but also mineral – e.g. clays for face masks and cleansers.

But 'natural' products sometimes use artificial preservatives. Some, like preservative K, are approved by the Soil Association (although some people can have an allergic reaction to it). Without preservatives, products must be used within 3 days, or they'll spoil. If preservative is used at 0.5%, the product will have a shelf-life of 2 years.

The best moisturiser is water, and the best way to obtain it is to drink it. It escapes through the skin and evaporates. Good moisturisers slow down this evaporation and add beneficial nutrients, and active ingredients like omega-3 (essential fatty acid that the body can't manufacture).



Aloe vera is a moisturiser and emollient used in skincare products. Grows happily in a pot indoors.

what are the benefits?

The benefits of natural skincare products can best be illustrated by comparison with mainstream / commercial products. The way that Mike Harmon, who we interviewed for this intro, describes mainstream commercial products is that 'they promise the earth, but really, they cost the earth'. Yes, it's corny, but you get the idea. They're more expensive than natural products, and worse for the environment and your health.

Some moisturisers hydrate the skin by attracting moisture from other parts of the body or from the environment. Petroleum jellies and other mineral oil products just form a barrier to prevent moisture from escaping. Initially, skin plumps up, because water is trying to get out; but in the long term, petrochemicals dry the skin and cause it to crack. Also, if moisture can't escape, neither can toxins, so petrochemicals put your skin – the largest eliminative organ of your body – out of action, putting stress on kidneys, liver and bowels. Toxins also end up in joints, causing mobility problems.

Other not-so-good ingredients in commercial products include: liquid paraffin (makes skin look like it's moisturised, and it's cheap), petrol (a strong solvent that's added to dissolve not-very-soluble ingredients), glycerine (can dry the skin when overused), and alcohol (another solvent, very cheap, dries the skin). And yet these products can be very expensive indeed. The public have begun to work it out though, and natural skincare products comprise one of the fastest-growing market sectors in the world. They don't cause the problems that mainstream products cause, plus they have positive benefits of their own.

There's more chance of an allergic reaction or irritation from a synthetic or petroleum-based product than a natural one. A lot of the ingredients in natural skincare products are used in the food industry. For example, emulsifiers used in creams and lotions are used in the Danish food industry to make ice-cream. 15 years ago, 'natural' products weren't so effective as they are today – we didn't have the knowledge we do now. They didn't feel very good on the skin, but you felt 'worthy' using them. Now natural products are much better than their commercial equivalent.

If you buy natural skincare products, you support small companies with a green ethos, and if you make your own, you can make sure that the ingredients are local and organic. In both cases, the ingredients themselves are (all or mostly) non-synthetic, biodegradable, and kinder to your body and the environment.



what can I do?

If you make your own, you can control what goes into them, and you can tailor them to your specific needs. No previous experience is needed, but we suggest that you attend a course - for a couple of reasons. Firstly, you can ask specific questions about the kind of products / ingredients for your particular requirements. Secondly, to make sure you're not doing something potentially harmful - just because ingredients are natural, doesn't mean that they can't cause problems. Some plants are toxic, and some can cause harm in some circumstances. Jasmine, for example, is an abortifacient, so shouldn't be included in products for pregnant women.

Making creams is a two-part process - one part is heating waters, the other part is heating oils, after which they are brought together like making mayonnaise or custard. Gels are even easier. You can make and sell products from your kitchen - you don't need special premises. There is legislation you need to comply with if you want to retail your product - see the Department of Trade and Industry cosmetic regulations - it may seem daunting but is easily achieved. Legislation will be covered on a good course.

Most of the raw materials are easily available anywhere - sunflower oil, olive oil, sweet almond oil. The less common ingredients are available online. You don't have to put essential oils in - they are the icing on the cake. But if you do, you can buy them or make your own. You have all the equipment you need in your kitchen - saucepans,



Some plants have been used as natural skincare for generations - for example, oil crushed from jojoba seeds has been used by native Americans for perhaps millennia, as a moisturiser, hair conditioner and to soften deer hides.

whisk, thermometer, stainless steel bowls, measuring jugs, spatulas (and the cooker) - you don't need any specialist equipment at all.

As for the cost benefits of making your own - what's the value of your health? But if you want to talk financial cost, the cream you make yourself usually costs less than the jar it's in. Compare this to the astronomical cost of some of the high-end commercial creams and you can see the cost benefit very easily.



Petroleum jelly is a byproduct of the crude oil industry. It forms a waterproof barrier that prevents moisture loss, but it also stops toxins from escaping - not a good idea. Shea butter is a natural, breathable alternative.

resources

- lowimpact.org/natural-skincare for more info, courses, links, books, including:
- Daniel Coaten, *Make Your Own Essential Oils & Skincare Products*
- Liz McQuerry, *Natural Skin Care at Home*
- Annie Strole, *Homemade Beauty*
- fromnaturewithlove.com/recipe - recipe database
- smartskinicare.com - huge bank of articles
- cir-safety.org - reviewing the safety of skin-care products & cosmetic ingredients

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