



natural bodycare



a range of home-made products and raw materials, including hand cream and gel, beeswax and vegetable oils

what is it?

When we talk about 'bodycare' in this context, we're talking about the outside of your body – not food or anything taken internally. So that's moisturisers, lip balms, creams, lotions, gels, shampoos, conditioners etc. Every culture has traditionally 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.

The 'natural' part is difficult to define – as soon as the multinationals start using the word, it's time to get 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. Low-impact, in other words. The skin is the body's largest organ. We eliminate toxins through it, and it allows 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 – for example essential oils, detergents from coconuts, veg oils for creams and flower waters for gels. Mineral ingredients are also used – 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 treated as fresh foods, and used within 3 days, or they will spoil. If preservative is used at 0.5%, the product will have a shelf-life of 2 years. Then you can have long-lasting products containing all the ingredients you do want on your skin.

The best moisturiser is water, and the best way to obtain it is to drink it. Then it escapes through the pores in the skin and evaporates. Good natural moisturisers slow down this evaporation without blocking the pores, and at the same time add beneficial ingredients to the skin – nutrients, and active ingredients like omega-3 (essential fatty acid that the body can't manufacture itself).

what are the benefits?

The benefits can best be illustrated by comparison with mainstream / commercial products. LILI's course tutor says: 'they promise the earth, but really, they cost the earth'. Yes, I know it's corny, but you get the idea. They're more expensive than natural products, and worse for the environment and your health.

Petroleum jellies and other mineral oil products seal the pores of the skin for up to 3 days per application. Yes, this keeps moisture in, and 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, toxins come out via skin pores, but petrochemicals stop this eliminative 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 (solvent, cheap, dries the skin). And yet these products can be



blending together beeswax, vegetable oil and 6 different essential oils to make ointments



very expensive. The public have begun to work it out - natural bodycare is one of the fastest-growing market sectors in the world. They don't cause the problems mentioned above, and they have positive benefits. There is 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 products are used in the food industry. Emulsifiers used in creams etc. are used in the Danish food industry to make ice-cream. 15 years ago, 'natural' products weren't so effective – we didn't have the knowledge. They didn't feel good on the skin, but you felt 'worthy' using them. Now natural products are better than their commercial equivalents.

Buying natural bodycare products supports small companies with a green ethos; if you make your own, you can source local, organic ingredients. In both cases, the ingredients themselves are (all or mostly) non-synthetic, biodegradable, and kinder to you 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 - you can ask specific questions about the kind of products / ingredients for your particular requirements, and you can 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 is covered on our course. Most of the raw materials are easily available – sunflower oil, olive oil, sweet almond oil. The less common ingredients are available mail order – e.g. from Aromatic, and a



few others. 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, whisk, thermometer, stainless steel bowls, measuring jugs, spatulas (and the cooker) – you don't need any specialist equipment. As for the cost benefits of making your own – what's the value of your health? But if you're talking financial cost, the cream you make yourself usually costs less than the jar it's in. Compare this to some of the high-end commercial creams, and you can see the cost benefit very easily.

resources

- LILI course: make your own natural skin-care products
- Daniel Coaten, 2007, *Make Your Own Essential Oils & Skin-care Products*, LILI
- Ruth Winter, *a Consumer's Dictionary of Cosmetic Ingredients* – a fantastic resource
- Aromatic, aromatic.co.uk, 01309 696900 - all base products & equipment you need to make natural skin-care products
- fromnaturewithlove.com/recipe - Recipe Database, lots of recipes for home-made cosmetics and toiletries
- Smart Skin Care, smartskincare.com, technical information on skin-care products and ingredients based on published research
- LILI's website has a natural bodycare links page with lots of suppliers and information

Contact us or visit our website to find out more about our message, networks, factsheets, books, courses, products, services, magazines, links, forum, events and volunteering on organic farms. You can also become a Friend of LILI, receive our e-newsletter, and help us change the world.

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