Flower Power: Inside Growing Interest in Topical Botanicals

Botanicals are cropping up in growing numbers of skincare products. Are you ready to field patient questions?

BY DENISE MANN, EDITOR-AT-LARGE

In late winter, an empty storefront in downtown Manhattan morphed into a pop-up version of the famed Mamonde Garden of Seoul, South Korea for just one day. The occasion was the launch of a new botanical skincare line, named for the garden.

Mamonde, owned by Amore Pacific, joins a host of other botanical skincare lines that may help treat rosacea, atopic dermatitis, acne, and other skin conditions as well as improve skin tone and hydration. Some have A-list celebs serving as brand ambassadors, which increases their street cred. Others have earned seals of approval from patient advocacy groups. For example, the National Psoriasis Foundation gave its seal to MetaDerm Heal & Prevent Cream, which is comprised of a proprietary blend of 25 botanicals.

There is a growing body of research looking at the benefits of botanicals for multiple conditions. A pilot study recently found that a combination of salicylic acid and botanical extracts (Kamedis Acne Spot Treatment) reduced the erythema associated with mild acne.\(^1\) New evidence shows miracle fruit seed oil can improve hair quality.\(^2\)

Pharma is putting a lot of money behind plant-derived drugs, with the global market expected to hit nearly $40 billion by 2022, according to a report from BCC Research.

A botanical is an ingredient in a skincare product that originates from plants—whether herbs, roots, flowers, fruits, leaves, seeds, or berries. Botanicals are not new to the beauty scene in any sense of the word. In fact, the use of botanicals in skincare dates back at least to Cleopatra who reportedly used black cumin seed oil to achieve radiant skin. They are, however, having a moment, due to the green and sustainability movement that is taking hold across multiple industries—including skincare.

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TAKING ROOT

“Botanical ingredients are more than a fad and are here to stay,” says Joshua Zeichner, MD, Director of Cosmetic and Clinical Research in Dermatology at Mt. Sinai Hospital and an assistant Professor in the Dermatology Department at Mt. Sinai Medical Center in Manhattan. “There is a distinct subset of consumers looking for natural skincare who are turning away from traditionally formulated products.”

Natural skincare offers the same benefits as traditional products, but is free of ingredients that are perceived as harmful to the skin, Dr. Zeichner says. “There are natural products to address aging skin, dry skin, inflamed skin, pigmentation, and every other issue that traditional products target.”

Just because a product is botanical-based or natural doesn’t mean it’s safe or safer. “So-called natural products have been associated with skin allergies and irritation as much as non-natural products,” he says.

Ultimately it comes down to priorities, Dr. Zeichner says. “Patients need to choose what their top priorities are and then choose products that fit into those preferences,” he says. “The good news is that there are many products on the market to suit every need.”
Diane Berson, MD, a New York City dermatologist, agrees. She recently touched on botanicals during a presentation on cosmeceuticals at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology in San Diego.

“The desire for sustainable and green ingredients is really big right now and is extremely popular with consumers,” she says. In particular, plant-based essential oils are experiencing a boom in skincare. Essential oils are made by distilling plant materials so that the oil is separated from the water.

Many essential oil-based skincare products offer significant benefits to users. They hydrate skin and restore the barrier; they also provide lipids to support the stratum corneum, humectants to pull in water and oils, and occlusive properties to seal in moisture. Some have anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial, and anti-itch properties, too. Many legacy brands are introducing essential oils into their product lines, including Nivea, with their new oil-infused lotions.

Not all essential oils are beneficial for skin. For example, research in the American Journal of Clinical Dermatology points out that oils with a higher linoleic acid to oleic acid ratio have better barrier repair potential, whereas oils with higher amounts of irritating oleic acid may be detrimental to skin-barrier function.1

Some essential oils may confer more risks than others. For example, tea tree, ylang ylang, and lavender oils may be more likely to cause skin reactions. Dr. Berson suggests that her patients test these products on small areas first before undertaking more widespread use.

Educating patients about these products is essential, she says. They are not always 100 percent botanical, and many still contain some preservatives. However, “they likely have fewer of the ingredients that patients are concerned with,” she says.

More and more patients will be asking about botanicals in skincare, and dermatologists should be prepared to answer their questions and make product recommendations and suggestions when needed.

1. Barak-Shinar, D and Draelos ZD. A Randomized Controlled Study of a Novel Botanical Acne Spot Treatment. http://jddonline.com/articles/dermatology/S1545961617P0599X/1