



Plants that Heal

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I am fascinated with the fact that many plants have healing capabilities, and I like to incorporate these plants into my products. Our skin absorbs products that we put on it, so I think it's really important to use good, pure ingredients in soap, salve, and lotions, instead of harmful chemicals.

God has provided wonderful substances in nature, including sunshine, water, minerals, and plants, that can help us stay healthy. Plants provide nourishment for our bodies and can be delicious to eat, and some of them can also help keep us well. Oils from these plants can be used for cooking, cleaning, and even for healing. Some plants are distilled in a special process to make essential oils that contain the plant's goodness in a highly concentrated form and can be used in soaps, lotions, salves, and aromatherapy.

A word of caution: **always use a carrier oil if applying essential oils to the skin**, and **don't take internally** unless the directions on the bottle say it is approved for that purpose and you have checked with your doctor first. Always check before using an essential oil on a pet (mostly no), small child, pregnant woman, or people with certain medical conditions. Citrus oils should not be used on the skin if you are going to be out in the sun. If you think you may have a sensitivity to an oil, test on a small patch of skin first to be sure you don't have an allergic reaction. When you purchase essential oils, look for a reputable source such as a health food store or a company that specializes in high-grade, pure essential oils (not fragrance oils – they are chemicals).

Here are the oils and herbs I use in my products. Reading about their wonderful properties will help you understand why these products are so helpful for healing.

Lavender essential oil The name lavender is derived from the Latin name *lavare*, which means to wash. Lavender is a workhorse essential oil, useful in so many ways. It can help alleviate eczema, acne, insect bites, stings, head lice, bruises, headaches, vertigo, migraine, fainting, and just about any aches and pains you can think of. Lavender is a must for any essential oil collection. Almost all my products contain lavender.

The pleasing scent of lavender elicits feelings of tranquility and calm, helping people relax and even aiding sleep, especially when used in a diffuser. It is a powerful antibacterial oil that can help boost immunity, and regular use can help provide resistance to a number of diseases and viruses. Due to its antibacterial and antiseptic properties, lavender essential oil is considered effective in treating various skin conditions, such as acne, because it inhibits the growth of bacteria while speeding up the healing process of the blemishes. This healing oil also can help speed up the healing of wounds, cuts, burns, and sunburns, while preventing the formation of scar tissue.

Peppermint essential oil has a clean, refreshing scent, and it goes well with lavender. Cooling and uplifting, peppermint also has antibacterial and antiviral properties. Some of its compounds include menthol, camphor, and carvacrol, which fight against many strains of bacteria. It can be helpful to

ease both headaches and migraines when used at the start of an attack. It can assist memory and combat fatigue. With all of its antibacterial, antifungal, and antiviral properties, peppermint essential oil is a great way to boost your immune system. It contains such compounds as menthol, camphor, and carvacrol, which are impervious to many dangerous strains of bacteria like salmonella, E. coli, and staph infections.

Peppermint is very good at easing muscle pains, colic, stomach cramps, colds, coughs, and flu symptoms. It is popular for its cooling scent that improves focus and mental clarity, boosts energy, clears the respiratory tract, and releases muscle tightness. Its anti-microbial property can help protect the body against bacteria.

Tea Tree Essential Oil A well known antiseptic, antiviral, and antibacterial oil, tea tree oil is also helpful for fighting off fungal infections, catarrh, sinusitis, chest infections, mouth ulcers, verrucas, and athlete's foot, in addition to treating spots, boils, cystitis, and thrush. This antiseptic oil can help prevent infection from developing in cuts, wounds, burns, and boils. It is also useful for treating insect bites and stings, shielding them from infection. Because of its antibacterial, antiviral, and antimicrobial properties, tea tree oil is used to treat skin infections such as acne, eczema, warts, and psoriasis and also for treating wounds. It can be applied directly to the feet to fight athlete's foot and nail fungus, as it also has antifungal properties. It is often used in natural cleaning products. Just be sure not to ingest this cure-all, as it is considered poisonous when consumed internally.

Lemongrass Like lemon, lemongrass is antibacterial and can be used for cleaning, but it has a sweeter scent and is not as sour as lemon. The **plant** itself can be eaten and is rich in folic acid, folate, zinc, magnesium, copper, potassium, iron, phosphorus, manganese, calcium, and vitamins A, B, and C. Dried or fresh, lemongrass boasts beneficial properties such as anti-inflammatory, analgesic, antidepressant, antiseptic, antipyretic, antibacterial, astringent, antifungal, carminative, febrifuge, diuretic, galactagogue, sedative, insecticidal, anti-cancer, and anti-aging properties. The compounds that make up lemongrass **essential oil** are known to have antifungal, insecticidal, antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties. It can be used to treat wounds and is useful for treating fungal infections on the skin. Lemongrass may prevent the growth of some bacteria and yeast, and it also contains antioxidant properties. Lemongrass essential oil is used in aromatherapy to help relieve muscle pain and externally to kill bacteria, ward off insects, and reduce body aches, in addition to adding a pleasant natural fragrance to cosmetics, soaps and homemade deodorizers.

OK, technically it's not an oil or an herb, but it comes from nature, and those little bees work very hard to make it. When used in creams and salves, beeswax prevents skin from drying out by helping it retain moisture. The scent of honey in the beeswax can be calming. Like other beehive products, including honey and royal jelly, beeswax offers anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, and antiviral benefits, making it potentially beneficial for treating minor skin irritations. When added to skin care products, beeswax acts as an emollient and a humectant, drawing moisture to the skin and sealing it in. Beeswax also contains vitamin A, which can be beneficial in softening and rehydrating dry skin and in cell reconstruction. Beeswax may have mild antibacterial properties, making it beneficial in the treatment of diaper rash and other bacterial skin conditions. If you are making products with beeswax, see if you can find a local beekeeper to supply you, and that way you know it's good. Farmer's markets are a good place to find local honey and beeswax. My beekeeper's number in my phone says "Honey Guy," and he lists me in his as "Lip Balm Lady."

Coconut Oil mixes well with other oils in a product and extends the product's shelf life. It penetrates the skin quickly and adds moisture without clogging pores. Coconut oil has antifungal and antibacterial properties. The medium-chain fatty acids in coconut oil have antimicrobial properties that can help protect against harmful microorganisms. This is especially important for skin health, as many types of skin infections, including acne, cellulitis, folliculitis, and athlete's foot, are caused by bacteria or fungi. Applying coconut oil directly to the skin may prevent the growth of these microorganisms.

Olive oil is packed with healthy vitamins, fats, and antioxidants, components which can contribute to healthier-looking skin. It moisturizes skin, and its antioxidants can help improve signs of aging. It also has anti-inflammatory properties. Some benefits of olive oil for the skin include: moisturizes and cleanses, fights oxidative stress, lowers the risk of acne, and promotes wound healing.

Shea Butter comes from the shea tree, *Butyrospermum parkii*, also called *Vitellaria paradoxa*. Considered a sacred tree, the shea tree is native to Central Africa. It is used in cosmetic and natural skin care products. Full of all-natural vitamin A, 100 percent pure, unrefined, raw shea butter can improve numerous skin conditions such as blemishes and wrinkles, stretch mark prevention during pregnancy, muscle fatigue, dermatitis, and radiation treatments for certain medical problems. Moisturizing and hydrating, when applied to the skin, shea butter provides immediate softness and smoothness.

Sunflower oil The vitamin E in sunflower oil has antioxidants that help with premature aging and wrinkles, keeping your skin looking young and fresh. Sunflower oil also contains linoleic acid, which helps skin retain moisture so it becomes less dry. Reinforcing this natural moisture barrier is especially helpful for those with eczema or otherwise dry skin. In addition, linoleic acid helps protect the face from bacteria and germs. Sunflower oil is highly absorbent and non-comedogenic. This means it will not clog your pores, and it is well-suited for various skin types — including acne-prone, dry, normal, and oily. Antioxidants like vitamin E help protect skin from wrinkles and negative effects from sun exposure. It has been shown to help wounds to heal faster.

Vitamin E Oil is a fat-soluble vitamin that acts as an antioxidant, helping protect cells from damage throughout the body. It's found in sebum (skin oil), which creates a natural barrier to keep moisture in your skin. Oilier skin surfaces, like the face, contain greater amounts of vitamin E. Sebum, along with vitamin E levels, naturally declines with age. Vitamin E is also depleted by ultraviolet light (UV) sources like sunlight, tanning beds, and some fluorescent, halogen, and incandescent light bulbs. You can also consume Vitamin E in your diet by eating foods such as sunflower seeds and oil, nuts, corn oil, spinach, broccoli, kiwi, and mango.

Palm oil has been used throughout the food supply and in certain parts of the world for thousands of years, but only lately has it earned widespread recognition for its health benefits. It has been associated with everything from reduced cholesterol levels to decreased oxidative stress and better brain health. Palm oil contains antioxidants and helps produce a harder bar of soap. Because of its popularity for cooking and cosmetics, production has increased, which means in some instances, deforestation. In my soap, I use non-hydrogenated palm oil that is RSPO certified and food safe, from a certified sustainable source.

Grapefruit seed extract Most people spit out the seeds when they eat grapefruit, but they may be better off chewing them up and swallowing instead. Grapefruit seed extract has many benefits,

including fighting bacteria and fungus. Due to its antimicrobial activities, grapefruit seed extract is commonly included in many throat sprays, nasal sprays, ear drops, mouth washes, toothpastes, shower gels, wound disinfectant sprays, and other personal care products. Instead of using unnatural and synthetic preservatives, many natural companies turn to grapefruit seed extract for its ability to preserve a product by killing unwanted bacteria. I use grapefruit seed extract as a natural preservative for my soap.

Other awesome herbs

Eucalyptus is a powerful disinfecting oil which has germicidal properties. It can speed healing of wounds and is a good addition to soap, as it helps fight skin infections. Diffusing it in your home can give a nice, fresh smell as it fights bacteria and germs in the air. Eucalyptus also has anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, and antiseptic properties.

Spearmint has a fresh, minty smell and goes really well with eucalyptus in room sprays and diffusing. It's delicious in tea and can help with tummy upsets. Spearmint has antibacterial properties and is high in beneficial antioxidant compounds.

A calendula flower is a special kind of marigold (*Calendula officinalis*). Its antifungal, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, and antiseptic properties can be helpful in healing/soothing conditions such as wounds, eczema, and diaper rash.

I infuse coconut oil with dried calendula petals to give my Peppermint Lotion Bars an extra touch of healing goodness. The petals also lend a beautiful golden color to oil in which it's infused. You can even grow your own calendula! I use it in flower arrangements and then later, snip off and dry the heads of the flowers so I can use the petals for infusion.

What is infusion, by the way? Heat the oil very gently in a stainless steel pot until it is barely warm, and then add calendula petals, transfer to a glass container, cover, put in a cool, dark place, and let it sit for about a month or more. Then, strain out the flower matter (you may need to reheat the oil if it has solidified), and you have beautiful, golden oil with added healing benefits. Beautiful and good for you!

Not only does it add delicious flavor to your cooking, oregano is also wonderful for your immune system. It fights infections in your colon and urinary tract and bacteria in your digestive tract without hurting the good flora that is so important to your health. The ancient Greeks used it to treat wounds and skin infections. It stimulates the production of white blood cells, boosting the immune system, and can help protect against some autoimmune disorders.

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