

Beauty

The Rise of the Herbal Beauty Tincture: Can You Drink Your Way to Better Skin?

by Celia Ellenberg



On a mid-Fashion Week morning last month, I was struggling with a list of symptoms that come with a back-to-back show schedule in the middle of blizzard season: Breakouts, fatigue, and a green-tinged, late-winter pallor. Emergency help was deemed necessary—but not the facialist’s variety: instead, I opted for an appointment with an herbalist.

Herbal tinctures—potent plant-based, drinkable holistic remedies that are steeped in alcohol to increase their concentration (and, therefore, their health benefits)—have long been used in traditional Chinese and alternative medicine. In recent years, however, they’ve increasingly gained momentum as a new kind of beauty cure. Backstage at Rodarte, for instance, makeup artist **James Kaliardos** was singing the praises of Dr. Bach’s flower remedies, while at Oscar de la Renta, the makeup artist **Gucci Westman** referred me to New York’s Chinatown, where she often gets custom-mixed herbs for concentrated doses of detox.

Before I set out for the Paris fashion shows, a chic French friend pointed me in the direction of the city’s Grande Herboristerie Médicale in Place de Clichy—then begged me to pick up her favorite insomnia-curing blend while I was there. Stocked with wall-to-wall pouches of herbs and gorgeous bound books of botanical drawings, the charming shop received a constant stream of customers who consulted its proprietors like dermatologists—a common occurrence across the pond, apparently. A quick Eurostar ride away at the Neal’s Yard Remedies London flagship store in Covent Garden, devotees of the more than 30 years old natural brand can enjoy more than 179 dried herbs and nearly as many tinctures, according to in-house lead herbalist **Tipper Lewis**. “Things that are classically used for detoxification—like nettle, dandelion, cleavers, and marigold—make a really lovely combination for skin,” Lewis reveals of the formulas that she and her well-trained staff use to create cold-pressed custom treatments for everythingzfrom dry skin and dullness to uneven tone and puffiness. (For those who reside outside of London, the company also sells its ready-made clarifying and brightening Mahonia Clear Skin Formula.)



My own herbal revelation came this past February, when word of a new integrative health service, known as The Antidote, caught my interest. A few days later, I was headed to my first appointment at acupuncturist **Shellie Goldstein**'s studio in the Flatiron neighborhood of Manhattan. Combining Goldstein's incredible AcuFacials with a tailor-made protocol of acupressure and lymphatic-drainage massage (designed by superstar facialist **Georgia Louise**), as well as herbal medicine (courtesy of Urban Healing's **Daniela Turley**), the protocol is designed to maximize aesthetic results by honing in on external and internal targets. When I met Turley—who practices at Goldstein's office—for an initial consultation, I filled out an in-depth questionnaire that assessed my diet and lifestyle in order to isolate the poor energy flow through my body's meridians (traditional Chinese "energy channels"). Then the pretty, British-born brunette commenced with her specialty: customized tinctures aimed at treating different imbalances in the liver, or the endocrine and digestive systems, which tend to manifest themselves on the skin.

While her premixed Fresh Face Skin tonic can work wonders on its own, Turley suggested a remedy of 5 milliliters of Astragalus root, horse chestnut, and rhodiola for my particular case to boost immune function, reduce inflammation, and combat the physical effects of fatigue. When diluted in a glass of water twice a day—and taken in conjunction with a few dietary "suggestions" (gluten: why must you taste so good, but be so bad?)—the herbal blend slowly nursed my complexion back to clarity, while boosting the effect of Goldstein's lifting and radiance-enhancing treatments. Not bad for scalpel-free, "alternative" medicine.