

Defenders of the earth

The future of anti-ageing may just lie in the natural world. Experts say it's all about ethnobotany – using turbo-boosted botanicals to change the ageing process; we say bring it on

Words by JESS LACEY Photographs by JASON HETHERINGTON Styled by LISA OXENHAM



Ageing issue:
PIGMENTATION
Natural wonder:
OPILIA EXTRACT

WHAT'S NEW: A 2013 worldwide study of 800 women aged 20 to 80 years old, carried out by Dior, showed pigmentation has overtaken wrinkles as our biggest ageing concern. Seventy-five per cent of women interviewed perceived youthfulness as the quality of texture and evenness of skin.

For the past 20 years, Dior has been growing potent skincare plants in dedicated gardens all over the world. Dior Capture Totale Dream Skin, £79, contains opilia extract, a botanical discovery from Burkina Faso, Africa, that can penetrate the skin's pigment balance to reduce dark spots and redness from deep down. After one week, tests showed colour imperfections in African-American skin to have faded by 83 per cent and Caucasian skin by 89 per cent.

Ageing issue:
DEHYDRATION
Natural wonder:
WHEAT GERM

WHAT'S NEW: Hyaluronic acid is the hydration hero of the chemical world. We produce it naturally in our bodies, but it is also easily synthesised in labs, meaning it can be found in pretty much every skin-plumping product around.

However, there are plant alternatives. Wheat-germ extract not only keeps skin hydrated just as well as its acid counterpart, it also bolsters barrier function to prevent water escaping. Plus, it's pretty much the richest source of vitamins A, D and E out there. Clinique Superdefense SPF20 Daily Defense Moisturizer, £39, contains your daily dose of wheat-germ extract along with SPF20 to protect against future damage.

Ageing issue:
FREE RADICALS
Natural wonder:
SAFFRON STEMS

WHAT'S NEW: Cells transmit stress signals to each other when they're under attack. This is great to trigger healing for an infection or burn, but this alarm also happens to cause inflammation and rally harmful free radicals, which accelerate ageing. Glycans are natural 'good' sugar complexes that exist throughout the body and can control cell communication to stop unnecessary meltdowns, but sadly they largely degenerate with age.

'Plants are the greatest producer of glycans there are,' confirms Caroline Nègre, scientific communication manager for Yves Saint Laurent Beauté. 'Nature is still the best chemist and is full of sources of powerful glycans.' The most abundant of those is crocin, which cannot be synthesised and is produced in saffron stems high in the Atlas Mountains. Its complex glycans reinforce free-radical defence and rapidly lower the body's inflammatory response, which is why it's the star ingredient in YSL Or Rouge, £295, which fights 11 signs of ageing.

Ethnobotanist Chris Kilham explains the power of plants like this: 'Humans and plants have co-evolved and we rely on them for nutrition, so it makes sense that the best treatments come from nature and you can't make something better in a lab.' ▶

Dior Capture Totale Dream Skin, £79



Clinique Superdefense SPF20 Daily Defense Moisturizer, £39



YSL Or Rouge, £295





Shiseido Future Solution LX Total Protective Emulsion, £250

La Prairie Cellular Swiss Ice Crystal Cream, £210



Chanel Le Lift Crème, £89



Ageing issue:
OXIDATION
Natural wonder:
OKRA EXTRACT

WHAT'S NEW: Antioxidants are compounds that stop cells having a chemical reaction with oxygen, because oxidation is the biggest cause of inflammation and premature ageing. It's a burning beauty issue, meaning that synthetic antioxidants are big business.

Actually, the key group of antioxidants, anthocyanins, are everywhere. 'There are more than 300 types of anthocyanins found in nature,' explains Karen Fischer, nutritionist and author of *Younger Skin in 28 Days*. 'The purple, black or red pigments in vegetables are caused by anthocyanins.' Therefore, the more purple a food is, the richer it is in antioxidants. So switch your apple for blueberries, white grapes for red, squash for aubergines and your green salad leaves for radicchio. Get antioxidant-rich star fruit and okra extract into your daily skincare routine with Shiseido Future Solution LX Total Protective Emulsion, £250. Feel free to wince at the price tag, but you're actually paying for the advanced chronobiology that can tap into the gene responsible for defending skin against external aggressors.

Ageing issue:
SENSITIVITY
Natural wonder:
ALPINE PLANTS

WHAT'S NEW: Strengthening the surface barrier of skin not only lessens sensitivity, but also stops premature ageing. In the winter months, skin can get thicker, in order to protect the mitochondria (skin's energy factories), but this increased density makes it look dull and grey. Purple saxifrage, soldanella alpina and Swiss snow algae are three alpine plants that have developed ways to grow through impossible surroundings of altitude and ice. In freezing temperatures, purple saxifrage creates micro-crystals to protect itself, soldanella alpina sleeps all winter and Swiss snow algae lies dormant under the snow, only to travel up to the surface come spring. Stem cells from all three plants have been combined in La Prairie Cellular Swiss Ice Crystal Cream, £210, to develop an anti-ageing complex that strengthens skin's resilience while also helping it to look more transparent and luminous.

Ageing issue:
FACIAL SAGGING
Natural wonder:
SOUTH AMERICAN EDULIS PLANT

WHAT'S NEW: Scientists in South Korea have dedicated studies to finding the most youthful face shape, and results show it's the heart. Full cheeks and a contoured jawline are widely considered to help you appear younger than your years, now making them the most requested features in facelift procedures.

The potent roots of the South American edulis plant have been shown in trials to be capable of regulating the chemical switches inside our skin cells to produce more protein and stop facial sagging. Since formulating the edulis into Chanel Le Lift Crème, £89, results have shown it to increase facial contours by a huge 42 per cent, leading to a sharper jawline and a more defined face shape. ▶



Beauty INNOVATIONS

Ageing issue:
LOSS OF ELASTICITY
Natural wonder:
BROWN ALGAE

WHAT'S NEW: Algae effectively increases blood circulation, stimulates the lymphatic system, removes unwanted toxins and treats skin conditions such as acne and eczema – so take it any way you can.

'We found a perennial brown algae on the coast of Brittany, France, with powerful rejuvenating qualities,' says Lorena Miraglia, head of product development and innovation at Crème de la Mer. 'In-vitro studies have shown that it helps to bring old fibroblasts back to the performance of young cells.' The algae supports natural collagen to improve skin's resilience against gravity and help hold its shape. Yes, you could jet off to Ibiza and back for the same amount of money, but Crème De La Mer Lifting Contour Serum, £230, is also ten times cheaper than a neck lift. For an algae intake on a budget, take weekly seaweed baths such as Viva Lazy Days, £16, which allows the body to readily absorb the vital vitamins, minerals and amino acids it needs to detoxify. ▶

