

# your well-oiled machine

The underutilized power of natural essential oils is just the salve that aging skin craves.

Learn the basics of botanicals and vegetables to reinvigorate your complexion. **BY ELENA SCHMIDT**

**A**CCORDING TO CARY CASTER, RESPECTED AROMATHERAPIST and founder of organic essential oils brand 21 Drops (21drops.com), therapeutic oils are a must when it comes to reducing the appearance of wrinkles, minimizing inflammation, and creating a daily regimen that will serve you for years to come. “It’s my job to know the effects of individual oil’s components and blend them to maximize their effectiveness,” she says. The patients of New York dermatologist Dr. Kenneth Mark swear by them. “I’m not a doctor who needs a double-blind study in *The New England Journal of Medicine*,” Dr. Mark says. “I learn from my patients.”

These anti-aging oils are created from the synthesis of active plant-based properties. Their concentrated structure (meaning small molecules) allows them to easily penetrate skin, although this makes them highly irritating when applied directly. For this reason,

essential oils are delivered in combination with hydrating “carrier” oils such as coconut, avocado, or sweet almond. These dilute and soften the formulas. Caster and Dr. Mark are keen on one particular carrier, jojoba, which isn’t greasy and allows for near-immediate absorption. “Jojoba is a stable wax, which extends the shelf life of oils, eliminating the need for preservatives,” says Caster.

These treatments are accessible to the public by organic brands such as 21 Drops and Mountain Rose Herbs (mountainroseherbs.com); most health food stores will offer a selection to peruse. Dr. Mark and Caster recommend a twice-daily application regimen to see a significant difference (in one to two weeks). Mark notes, however, that oils will not work the same for everyone. “Some people are not going to respond well and others are going to get great results,” he says. Let the mixing begin.

**ROSE, CISTUS, PATCHOULI, PALMAROSA, CARROT SEED for wrinkles**

The most tell-tale sign of aging is the creasing we develop as skin loses its elasticity. Like the rings on a tree, wrinkles betray the decades we’ve lived. A member of the carotenoid family, carrot seed is known to strengthen skin’s elasticity and disperse age spots, says Dr. Mark. Caster notes that these oils promote cell regeneration while helping to balance sebum production.

**CYPRESS, MYRRH for varicose veins**

Pesky protruding veins caused by genetics, weight gain, and age meet their match in the essential oils of cypress and myrrh. Cypress oil has been used for centuries to build vein integrity, according to Caster, who notes their highly astringent properties. Myrrh is known for its pain-relieving qualities and is also used to decongest the lymph and veins. “Both of these oils have a vaso-constrictive effect,” she says, “and can help to alleviate varicose veins.”

**CARDAMOM, SWEET ORANGE, GERANIUM, JUNIPER BERRY for daily maintenance**

Daily incorporation of essential oils is an intelligent anti-aging strategy to feed your skin needed nutrients. “I recommend oils that build up the overall terrain and tonify the body systems to aid in daily resilience and detoxification,” says Caster. Select your oil and carrier of choice and apply it before makeup and before bed, indefinitely.

**ROSE GERANIUM for inflamed skin**

Inflamed skin from sensitivities, injury, or disease has proven to be a tricky, eternal obstacle to the clear and youthful complexion you’re after. A recent study conducted by the *Libyan Journal of Medicine*, which was done on inflamed ears, offers a new hope for relief via the use of rose geranium essential oil. The study on inflamed ears showed that with regular topical application, rose geranium reduced inflammation by 88 percent.

**CARROT SEED, HELICHRYSUM, ROCK ROSE, PATCHOULI, PALMAROSA for sunburn relief**

Burns contribute to advanced skin aging and dryness, yet many of us continue to overdose on the sun’s rays. Caster conceived this blend to protect her children from the Florida sun, finding that it healed damaged skin and prevented burning and peeling. These oils can be blended in varying ratios in a carrier of moisturizing coconut and tamanu butter.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GETTY IMAGES (PETALS, OIL)