

# TREASURE TROVE OF BEAUTY

*Ex Africa semper aliquid novi* goes the Latin saying. Out of Africa, always something new. These days this continent is also the source of many discoveries for the cosmetics industry.

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**T**here was a huge oak tree outside my house in Johannesburg. It was my nature clock. When the softest green shimmer started to appear in the highest bare branches, then spring was on the way. Mother Nature's reliable cycle of rebirth, renewal and promise. And when the jasmine bloomed and that intoxicating scent hung in the air, the promise was fulfilled.

Trend gurus say our awareness of nature has increased dramatically over the past two years, and this trend is still building momentum. We are increasingly aware that the well-being of humanity

should be rooted in a conscious connection with nature and not in toxic consumer products.

In the cosmetics industry too, new natural products are being formulated and produced in rhythm with nature. This includes not only botanical extracts of flowers, blossoms, leaves, seeds, fruit, bark, roots and herbs, but also taking into account the cycles of the moon.

The so-called 'rewilding' (restoration of nature) of our skin is also a part of this. British *Vogue* recently wrote that it is a growing trend because we are bringing good bacteria (our microbiome) back into

skincare. 'We have become out of touch with nature ... and skin ailments have risen as a result. Rates of chronic skin diseases like rosacea, eczema and psoriasis are on the rise.'

Africa is a treasure trove of natural finds for researchers who travel the world and learn from indigenous peoples about the plant products that they use to stay healthy and beautiful. In South Africa, we have almost inexhaustible, sustainable natural resources thanks to our biodiversity: from buchu to dagga, sausage tree to marula, the giant baobab to the tiniest mushroom. So says John Knowlton,





cosmetic developer and owner of Cosmetic Solutions in Johannesburg. He is an expert in our indigenous botanical kingdom and has already helped to put numerous cosmetic houses on the map with his formulations. From his research it appears that the use of phytocosmetics (phyto is Greek for plant) in African culture stretches back to the earliest times of traditional healers. 'Africa has an extensive tradition of using plants for beauty. The cosmetic potential of the African pharmacopeia is colossal. There is a growing interest in it worldwide.'

As one of the oldest civilisations on earth, Egypt is the birthplace of those gifts from the gods – cosmetics. The ancient Egyptians were already using make-up by 3100 BC and vases and palettes containing make-up have been found in pharaohs' tombs.

The Egyptians attached great value to their appearance, their weight, hair and skin. They were actually bon vivants, because cosmetic products for hygiene, personal grooming and an attractive appearance were all important elements of their daily lives. They used natural oils from sesame, olives, almonds and cardamom as moisturisers. Henna was used to colour their hair, skin and fingernails. Cleopatra bathed in milk and honey to maintain her beauty and youthfulness. Oat powder, cocoa butter, incense and sandalwood oil were apparently also part of her bathing ritual. For skin cream, she used a mixture of rose water, beeswax and almond oil.

Herbs and oils for skincare and healing are as old as the human race. Greek philosopher Aristotle, for example, sang the praises of the medicinal benefits of aloes.

Now that it feels as though the world is at a tipping point, it is not surprising that the market trend is to reject synthetic chemical ingredients in favour of

holistic, botanical products that are rich in proteins, vitamins, antioxidants, oils and other biological ingredients.

According to Knowlton, plant oils are mostly used for skin nourishment, and essential aromatic oils as the base for luxurious perfumes. Skin oils include avocado, almond, rapeseed, apricot and grape seed, and sesame, sunflower, coconut, linseed and palm oils. The last named has fallen out of favour because of the damage done to the rainforests as a result of the huge demand for it.

Seed oils are rich in fatty acids, which are needed to keep the protein chains in skin cells in good condition. Linoleic acid is the most sought after and most widely used in skincare. A deficiency causes moisture loss in the epidermis, dry and rough skin, brittle nails and hair loss. It is used to moisturise and for sun damage.

## TREASURES FROM AFRICA

### MARULA TREE

**WHAT AND WHERE:** The savanna of southern Africa, from Limpopo to Namibia. The fleshy fruit is edible. The seed oil is used in skincare for moisturising. British *Vogue* recently wrote about the astonishing properties of this oil. In Namibia, the tree provides an income for lots of families who harvest and process the fruit and seeds.

**CONTAINS:** Up to 75% oleic and various other fatty acids.

**HELPS WITH:** Moisturising, redness. Indigenous tribes use the oil as shampoo, for cracked skin and to massage babies.

**FIND IT IN:** Lulu & Marula Nourishing Treatment Oil; Lulu & Marula Purifying Treatment Oil; Cosmetiq E Multivitamin Skin Rejuvenator; SKNlogic Omega Face Oil.

### SAUSAGE TREE (KIGELIA AFRICANA)

**WHAT AND WHERE:** Also known as the cucumber tree, it bears huge fruit. It is found throughout tropical Africa, including in some parts of our country. Used medicinally in potions by traditional healers and also cosmetically.

**CONTAINS:** Two flavonoids (quercetin and luteolin) and saponin. Anti-inflammatory and microbial.

**HELPS WITH:** Eczema, fungal infections, psoriasis, boils and general skincare. In African communities, women use the fruit extract to make their breasts fuller and firmer. It also helps for actinic keratosis (precancer of the skin caused to sun damage) on the face and hands, purifies the skin, firms the delicate skin around the eyes, smooths wrinkles, improves elasticity and lightens pigmentation and marks.

**FIND IT IN:** Pradiance, a South African skin- and haircare range.

### BUCHU

**WHAT AND WHERE:** A Cape plant known for its aromatic oil and healing power. Products come in various forms – a cream or gel that is applied to the skin, capsules and a detox tea.

**CONTAINS:** Antioxidants and flavonoids. Anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and antifungal.

**HELPS WITH:** Eczema, itchiness and inflammation. Daily use keeps the skin healthy and has anti-ageing properties, says immunopathologist and medical researcher Professor Patrick Bouic who has been studying the health benefits of buchu for over 15 years. 'Ageing is an inflammatory process. Buchu decreases inflammation: It switches off the genes which lead to inflammation, in turn reducing the ageing effects of inflamma-

tion. It regulates the body's repair mechanism, allowing for better regeneration of skin cells.' Buchu in your daily diet also helps with muscle recovery after exercise. As a detoxifier, it helps the kidneys to excrete toxins.

**FIND IT IN:** Cape Kingdom Organic Detox Buchu Tea with Green Rooibos. Buchu capsules. Cream and gel.

### ROOIBOS

**WHAT AND WHERE:** Rooibos is endemic to the dry, mountainous Cederberg area.

**CONTAINS:** Powerful antioxidants, flavonoids and minerals. Hypo-allergenic.

**HELPS WITH:** Healthy skin cells and anti-ageing. Eczema, acne, allergies, bacterial infections, serious sunburn, an irritated skin, damaging environmental factors.

**FIND IT IN:** Skincare ranges like Annique, the African Extracts Rooibos Radiance range. Rooibos tea.

### MUSHROOMS

**WHAT AND WHERE:** We are experiencing a 'shroom boom' in skincare, says British beauty website Cult Beauty – over the past year they have seen an increase of 480% in questions about skincare ranges that contain mushrooms. This fungus has been a key ingredient in Eastern beauty and healthcare for centuries, even though only some of the 14 000 species are suitable for use. There is promising research into micro-doses of psilocybin (magic mushrooms) for depression and mental health disorders.

**CONTAINS:** Tons of antioxidant and anti-inflammatory ingredients. Beta-glucan, which strengthens the skin barrier.

**HELPS WITH:** Protecting against environmental aggressors like pollution. Restores a troubled skin to normal, calm levels.

Six species in particular stand out for their magical skincare powers:

**REISHI:** This 'queen' of mushrooms strengthens the skin barrier, eases inflammation and tackles wrinkles and redness.

**SHIITAKE:** Contains high levels of kojic acid, which evens out skin tone. Lightens dark marks, pigmentation and blemishes, brightens the skin.

**CHAGA:** Neutralises free radicals, stimulates the circulation for better skin colour, and delivers micronutrients deep into the dermis.

**CORDYCEPS:** It's an antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, hydrates the skin, stimulates collagen and elastin production.

**TREMELLA:** Improves skin hydration and plumps wrinkles. Absorbs 500 times its weight in water, which makes it a very effective moisturiser.

**TRAMETES:** Antioxidant and anti-inflammatory, improves circulation for a more youthful skin.

**FIND THEM IN:** From anti-ageing serums to food supplements. Dermalogica Hydro Masque Exfoliant for dry neck skin.

### MONGONGO (MANKETTI)

**WHAT AND WHERE:** These trees are found throughout subtropical southern Africa. They can cope with extreme temperatures from -50°C in the winter to 40°C in the summer. The fruit tastes sweet, like dates. The nuts have a high percentage (57%) of lipids and 26% protein.

**CONTAINS:** The cold-pressed seed oil from the nut contains vitamin E, zinc and fatty acids like eleostearic, linoleic, oleic, palmitic and erucic acids.

**HELPS WITH:** Anti-ageing and cell renewal (vitamin E), the fatty acids protect hair fibres and repair colour-damaged hair, natural sunscreen (zinc).

**FIND IT IN:** Placecol skincare products. Hair products.

✿ For more wellness advice from Elsa Krüger  
visit her blog, [mooipraatjies.com](http://mooipraatjies.com).

## BULBINE FRUTESCENS

(CAT'S TAIL, BURN JELLY PLANT)

**WHAT AND WHERE:** A succulent that grows in Limpopo and the dry valleys in South Africa. Women in Limpopo harvest the plant.

**CONTAINS:** A gel-like sap that has been used for many generations by traditional healers for its soothing and anti-inflammatory effects. The latest clinical research shows that the sap stimulates collagen formation.

**HELPS WITH:** Loss of firmness – lifts and tightens the skin. Reduces appearance of wrinkles, smooths wrinkles around the eyes by 74% one hour after use. Lifts sagging skin. Vegan friendly.

**FIND IT IN:** Afari Skincare ([afari.co.za](http://afari.co.za)). The sale of these products helps rural women in Limpopo to earn a living.

## KALAHARI MELON

(T'SAMA, WILD WATERMELON, MAKATAAN)

**WHAT AND WHERE:** Grows in the Kalahari desert, Namibia, Botswana and South Africa. One of 1 200 watermelon species. Nutritious and healthy. Traditionally used in Namibia for making soap.

**CONTAINS:** The seeds consist of 50% oil, 35% protein and 5% fibre. The oil produced from the seeds is rich in fatty acids and tocopherol, an important cosmetic ingredient. Also rich in omega 6, which stimulates cell growth and restructures the skin.

**HELPS WITH:** Strengthens the skin and restores elasticity. Also protects the skin and moisturises it.

**FIND IT IN:** Cosmetiq E Multivitamin Skin Rejuvenator. Products for sun and after-sun care.

## WATERMELON

**WHAT AND WHERE:** Originally from the Sahara. Spread widely throughout Africa for over 3 000 years, and also common in South Africa.

**CONTAINS:** A rich source of antioxidants, carotenoids, vitamins A, B and C as well as water, magnesium, sodium and potassium. Fatty acids make up 20-40% of the oil.

**HELPS WITH:** Has been used since the ancient Egyptian civilisation to keep the skin youthful and healthy. Exceptionally moisturising, feeds the skin and restores elasticity.

**FIND IT IN:** Face masks for delicate skin, soap.

## BAOBAB

**WHAT AND WHERE:** Indigenous to Madagascar, but also in dry parts of central, southern, East and West Africa. It takes between eight and 23 years for the trees to start producing fruit. The demand for the fruit's pulp and seeds has increased dramatically thanks to their cosmetic, nutritional and medicinal values.

**CONTAINS:** Rich in palmitic, oleic and linoleic acids, as well as in vitamins A, D3, E and F and polyunsaturated fats. Baobab seeds are a source of iron, lysine, calcium and thiamine, while the pulp contains 10 times more vitamin C (antioxidant) than oranges.

**HELPS WITH:** Anti-ageing, cell renewal, repairs skin. Penetrates deep, softens and moisturises dry skin, makes the skin elastic and supple. Non-allergenic, antiviral. Helps with eczema and psoriasis. The heated oil is used for nails and hair.

**FIND IT IN:** It is used as a base oil in lots of cosmetic products. The pure oil is available from health shops.

## ALOES: ALOE VERA

**WHAT AND WHERE:** The therapeutic value of aloes has been known for more than 2 000 years in Africa, and their use stretches back to biblical times. This is one of the most commonly used plant extracts in skincare worldwide. The Egyptians call it the 'silent healer', 'plant of immortality' and 'divine gift'. Queen Nefertiti, said to be the most beautiful woman who ever lived, also used it.

**CONTAINS:** Powerful antioxidants and polysaccharides.

**HELPS WITH:** The gel and latex from the plant are anti-inflammatory, antifungal and antibacterial. It heals wounds, calms and moisturises skin.

**FIND IT IN:** Hair products, perfume, sunscreen, shaving cream, toothpaste and facial cleansers.

## ALOE FEROX (BITTER ALOE)

**WHAT AND WHERE:** South Africa's Cape coastal regions, Swellendam, Albertinia, KwaZulu-Natal coast and Lesotho.

**CONTAINS:** Active ingredients for skincare: phenolic compounds like anthrone, anthrone-C-glycosides, chromium and anthraquinones. Also aloesin which helps prevent hyperpigmentation caused by UV exposure.

**HELPS WITH:** Small doses of chrystals are used to purify the blood for acne, the leaves are used for shampoo, and the gel inside the leaves is sought after for therapeutic skin products that treat hyperpigmentation.

**FIND IT IN:** Aloe Unique skincare range. Biomedcan CBD Skin Repair Gel. Sunscreens, shampoo, cleansers, pigmentation products, moisturisers.

## TALLOW WOOD, YELLOW PLUM (XIMENIA AMERICANA)

**WHAT AND WHERE:** The small trees or shrubs grow in Namibia. Nutritious, used medicinally and cosmetically.

**CONTAINS:** Ximenia oil and ximenynic acid, which is a very long chain fatty acid, rare in nature and therefore very valuable.

**HELPS FOR:** Cellulite. Improves circulation within an hour. The seed is ground and mixed with red ochre for use on the skin and hair.

**FIND IT IN:** Lipstick, lipbalm, creams, anti-ageing products, shampoo and hair conditioner, eye make-up, skincare products for acne.

## CANNABIS (DAGGA)

**WHAT AND WHERE:** Plentiful in South Africa, Africa and worldwide. Cannabidiol oil (CBD), extracted from the plant, is considered the new fountain of youth. CBD is not psychoactive and is legally isolated thanks to its healing properties. (THC is the psychoactive part of marijuana that makes you 'high'.)

**CONTAINS:** Antioxidants that delay the ageing process by fighting free radicals and preventing collagen loss. This keeps the skin youthful, firm and strong. Anti-inflammatory.

**HELPS WITH:** Ageing skin, rehydrates dry, irritated skin, helps with eczema, psoriasis, inflammation, burns, sunburn, bites and stings, breakouts, rosacea, acne. It nourishes sensitive skin and holds moisture in the dermis.

**FIND IT IN:** Biomedcan CBD Skin Repair Gel, anti-ageing products, nutritional supplements.

## RESURRECTION PLANT

(MYROTHAMNUS FLABELLIFOLIA)

**WHAT AND WHERE:** The dry sands of the age-old Namib Desert. If you come across it, you might not even notice it because it usually looks dead. In this harsh environment, the plant can dehydrate almost completely without it dying. It remains bone dry until it gets water and then literally within hours springs back to life and is 'resurrected'. It has developed molecules that survive drought stress, store water and combat environmental stress.

South African cosmetic group Esse is working with 12 nomadic Kunene tribes, who share in the profits of the products in which the extract is used. The local people help to protect the sensitive ecology of the area and to harvest the wild plants.

**CONTAINS:** Antioxidants. Anti-inflammatory, anti-carcinogenic. Produces flavonoids that tackle free radicals and active ingredients that keep the skin youthful. Polyphenols help the plant to protect its DNA from damage for years. Rich in trehalose, a sugar molecule that ensures natural balance by helping proteins to keep their shape, no matter how dry it becomes.

**HELPS WITH:** Rapid moisturiser. Esse's original tests in Germany showed that a gel in the extract improved skin hydration noticeably for 24 hours with just a single application.

**FIND IT IN:** Dermalogica Neck Fit Contour Serum, Esse skincare products.

### SOURCES:

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