

Mother's Day at Home: DIY Spa Relaxation With Household Ingredients



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Skincare: Popular in All Time Periods

We often think of early cosmetics in their strangest and sometimes most poisonous preparations—and it's true that, for instance, the lead in white face powder was a definite danger for women hoping to make themselves up even through the 18th century. Some cosmetic and skincare ingredients—including incenses and perfumes like myrrh, musk or civet—were carried along the extensive trade routes that organized world commerce in the early modern world.

Mostly, though, women, especially in less urban and accessible areas, developed ways of caring for themselves and making themselves up with what they had at home, and many skin preparations were made with ingredients that might be purchased but might just as easily be found in field, forest and garden. One 1779 book offers the following recipe for “A Water to Improve the Complexion” made of oxgall and wine, not typically used in cosmetic preparations today; eggs, which often still are; and *three different types of beans*:

Take Chick Peas, French Beans, and Garden Beans, of each four ounces; peel off their skins, powder them, and infuse in a quart of White Wine; add the Gall of an Ox, and the Whites of fifteen new laid Eggs. Mix the ingredients thoroughly, distil in a glass alembic with a sand heat; and wash the face with the distilled Water, as occasion requires.

(Pierre-Joseph Buchoz, *The Toilet of Flora*)

A recipe like this could be followed even by someone who lacked access to the “Gum Benjamin” and frankincense demanded by some of Buchoz’s other preparations—but he offered even simpler suggestions, such as fighting freckles by rubbing them with “the juice of one-half onion.” Whether or not it worked, onion-therapy was certainly accessible for the average person! Even as more commercial skin care and cosmetic products came onto the market over the 19th and early 20th centuries, some at-home treatments remained popular, allowing women to retain control over certain aspects of how they treated and changed their looks.

In the spirit of this at-home beautification tradition, what follows is a series of “beauty” and relaxation treatments that can be made using products many of us have already, or can easily access at the grocery store. Even though we may be spending it in often-tight quarters at home this year, Mother’s Day can include some rest and pampering for the moms, grandmothers and other hardworking women in our lives. Why not try some simple spa concoctions, like sugar and coffee scrubs or oatmeal face masks, that can be made with household ingredients already in the pantry?

Cucumber-Green Tea Sugar Scrub

¼ c granulated sugar
2 tbsp olive oil
1 tsp green tea leaves
approx. 2" slice of cucumber

Finely blend together oil and cucumber, then mix in sugar and tea until fully combined. Massage in circular motions onto skin and let sit for a moment before rinsing.

Oatmeal Face Mask

3 tbsp rolled oats
1 tbsp honey
squeeze of lemon juice

Grind rolled oats into smaller pieces, or even flour if preferred. Combine all ingredients, let sit for a few minutes for the oats to soak and soften, and apply to face (avoiding contact with eyes—lemon stings!). Rinse after 15-20 minutes.



Coffee Body Scrub

¼ c coffee grounds (can be used)
¼ c brown sugar
¼ c coconut oil

Mix sugar and coffee grounds together, then stir in coconut oil. Gently rub over skin to exfoliate and then rinse in shower.

Avocado Yogurt Face Mask

½ ripe avocado
1 tbsp plain yogurt
1 tsp honey, if desired

Mash up avocado and stir in yogurt and optional honey. Spread evenly over face and rest for 10-15 minutes before rinsing.

Chamomile-Orange Foot Soak

2 tbsp chamomile (approx. 8 teabags)

zest of ½ an orange

3 tbsp baking soda

½ c Epsom salts (optional)

Combine all ingredients in a large basin or footbath and pour hot water over. Allow to steep until water is cool enough to touch, then put feet in and relax!

Coconut Hair Treatment

2 tbsp coconut oil, melted

1 tbsp honey

1 egg

Whisk egg and add to the coconut oil, then whisk in honey until smooth. Work through hair root to tip, then wrap up and leave for 30 minutes before shampoo and rinse.



(Cucumber illustration via [Marilyn Walzer](#); all other botanical illustrations [U. S. Department of Agriculture Pomological Watercolor Collection, Rare & Special Collections, National Agricultural Library](#))