



Essential oils to soothe your dry winter skin

They're extracted from fruits, flowers, nuts, leaves, bark, resin, and roots — all in a pure form with minimal processing. Oils have always been a part of our traditional skincare regimens, not just for moisturising, but also for cleansing.

In their purest form, as essential oils, they can “promote the generation of healthy skin cells,” says Dr Chytra Anand, Founder and CEO of the chain of Kosmoderma Skin & Hair Clinics in Bengaluru. But many can prove too intense for direct application. “Several essential oils cause irritations and allergies even on normal skin, so we don't recommend concentrated extracts like tea tree or citrus, only pure oils like coconut and olive oil,” says Dr Bincy Varghese, consultant dermatologist, Gurugram.

Coconut: “Coconut oil is the most soothing with the least reaction. It is also a better moisturiser than olive oil, so great for dry winter days,” adds Dr Varghese. With the presence of vitamins E and K, and anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties, it is great for all skin problems and irritations. The lauric acid in it makes it a good anti-scar oil too. However, it may not be the best bet if you have oily- and acne-prone skin.

Sesame: With its rich essential fatty acids, it is a great nourishing and moisturising oil that also helps delay wrinkles when used regularly.

Almond: With its light texture, it is a delicate oil suitable for the face. With vitamin E, zinc, proteins, and potassium, it has many health benefits.

Jobba: “The chemical structure of our skin's natural oil is very similar to that of jojoba oil. It contains minerals such as copper and zinc, and vitamin B that help strengthen the skin. It's a great anti-inflammatory agent for acne-prone or irritated skin, as it is rich in vitamins A and E,” says Dr Anand.

Olive: “Being super-rich in fatty acids and vitamin E, it's a great moisturiser and is recommended for dehydrated skin during winter. Like jojoba, it is similar to the oils naturally produced by our skin, so is absorbed well. However, it is a heavy oil, so those with acne should avoid it on their face,” says Dr Anand.

Grapeseed: A light oil, it contains vitamin E and essential fatty acids. It offers anti-oxidant, anti-microbial, and anti-inflammatory properties.

Tea tree oil: It has great anti-bacterial and anti-fungal qualities, hence ideal for fighting dry and itchy skin and inflammation. However, always use it diluted with a carrier oil like coconut, olive, or almond — 1 to 2 drops to 12 drops of carrier oil.

Ylang Ylang: “Its name means ‘flower of flowers’. It balances oil production in the skin. It also has anti-ageing effects. Its antiseptic properties help clear up acne. It is often used in facials and skin preps,” says Dr Anand.

Rose: It is one of the least toxic oils, best suited for older and drier skin. “It has anti-bacterial properties, hence a perfect toner to use for removing make-up.”

Comfrey: A great skin regenerator, comfrey helps keep skin youthful and less susceptible to the formation of wrinkles. It’s also helpful in treating stretch marks, says Dr Anand.

Jasmine: It soothes inflamed and irritated skin and is also a mood enhancer. According to Dr Anand, it can help in treating dry or dehydrated skin, eczema and dermatitis.

Lemon: While it is anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, calming and hydrating, it needs to be used correctly. “Immediate exposure to sun after using it can cause photo toxicity or redness and irritation of the skin,” says Dr Varghese.

Peppermint: One of its best-known qualities is its ability to soothe and cool.

“Always dilute the oil in a base like grape seed oil, aloe vera, or jojoba,” says Dr Anand.

Lavender: It is a powerful antioxidant that can fight the harmful effects of pollutants on the skin. “Very useful for acne-prone skin, it is an antiseptic that can be used for many skin conditions,” says Dr Anand.

Orange: Being rich in vitamin C, it helps with collagen production, hence is anti-ageing. It increases the blood flow, thus clearing clogged pores.

“A generous application on the heels clears cracked feet,” she says.

Testing, testing

“Do test a small quantity on your arm, and wait for reactions before taking the plunge,” says Dr Varghese.

When in doubt, check with a dermatologist if you can use a particular oil on your skin.

Oils that work for the body may not always be suitable for the face, especially if you have acne, or a sensitive skin.

Use only cold-pressed, organic oils for the best results.

Pure extracts are diluted using carrier oils like coconut, sesame, olive or almond. Mixed in the right proportions, these concoctions can work wonders on your skin.