

The fountain of youth

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Herbalist Toni Green shares secrets of the super herbs, which can help you to live a longer, healthier life.

D-I-Y with Toni:

Longevi-tea

Steep half a teaspoon each of dried gotu kola leaves and green tea in a mug of freshly boiled water. Add honey for sweetness. Sip and enjoy.

Gotu kola (*Centella asiatica*)

Best known for its role in healing wounds, burns, and skin problems like psoriasis, thanks to its ability to increase fibroblast production in skin, which in turn boosts collagen synthesis, gotu kola is also rich in triterpene saponins which firm and tighten the skin and antioxidant flavonoids which protect it from environmental stressors. Research published in *Molecules* shows that gotu kola extracts improve the condition of ageing skin and reduce the appearance of fine lines, thanks to antioxidant activity that is comparable to vitamin C and grapeseed extract.

Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*)

This contains more silica – which helps synthesise collagen, keeping skin smooth and wrinkle-free - than any other herb, and it's in a highly absorbable form. Specifically, horsetail improves skin texture and tone and acts as both an antioxidant to brighten skin, and as a refiner, minimising the appearance of large pores. It is rich in minerals that strengthen nails and treat white spots on nails; research published in the *Journal of International Medical Research* shows soaking brittle nails in horsetail tea will repair them.

Aloe vera (*Aloe barbadensis*)

Topical application of the gel from this plant's leaves stimulates collagen production, with an *Annals of Dermatology* study showing it enhances elasticity and minimises wrinkles in photoaged skin. Aloe vera can also be taken as a supplement, with another *Annals of Dermatology* study showing this measurably improves skin elasticity in 90 days; other research shows it is an excellent nutritive treatment for dry skin, and an effective aftershave treatment; it also stimulates new hair growth by increasing microcirculation to the scalp. To make a cleansing face wash that will lighten age spots, mix 1 tablespoon of aloe vera gel with 1 teaspoon each of almond milk and lemon juice. Massage into skin, avoiding eye area, then rinse off.

Green tea (*Camellia sinensis*)

Green tea's tannins and antioxidants shrink blood vessels in the under-eye area, so reducing puffiness, while its vitamin K content lightens dark circles. A *Medical College of Georgia* study shows green tea aids skin rejuvenation and can be used to treat rosacea. Its anti-ageing prowess is due to its polyphenols, which neutralise harmful free radicals that speed skin ageing; plus, they prevent skin cancer. Green tea contains catechins which have 5-alpha-reductase properties, meaning they block DHT (dihydrotestosterone), a key factor associated with hair loss.

Rose (*Rosa canina*)

Both rosewater and rosehip oil have anti-ageing properties. The oil contains vitamins C and A which improve skin hydration and treat wrinkles and sun spots. Rosewater helps maintain the skin's natural pH balance; it's also a wonderful natural treatment for an inflamed scalp. Try applying a rosewater compress after a facial steam to reduce redness and blotchiness.

Toni Green is a Tasmania-based naturopath, herbalist, and iridologist.

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