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red **BEAUTY** / SKIN AND HAIR

Nature's best beauty secrets

The most buzzed-about new ingredients weren't concocted in a lab—they're simple, powerful elements found in the great outdoors. Here's why experts say they're the ticket to healthy hair and skin.

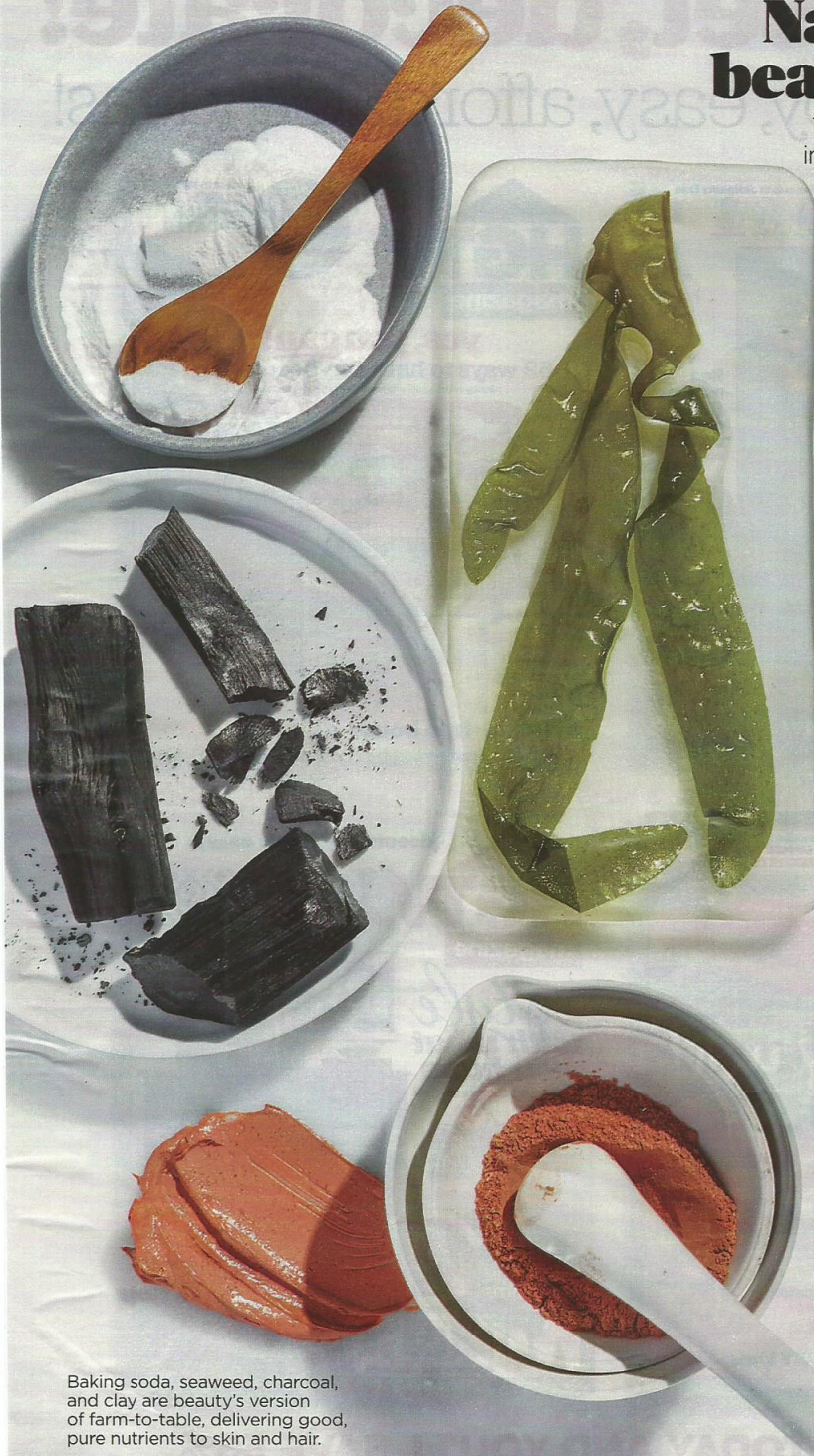
BY KAYLEIGH DONAHUE HODES

CLAY: BALANCES OILY SKIN AND HAIR

According to legend (and by that we mean the beauty blogosphere), clay was the Vaseline of ancient Egypt. People slathered it on for everything from cleansing to wound healing. What they may not have known is that clay works best for regulating skin's oil production. "If you have oily or combination skin, apply a clay face mask once a week to areas where you get shiny," says dermatologist Ava Shamban, M.D., an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the UCLA–Geffen School of Medicine. Keep in mind that not all masks work the same.

"A formula with French green clay or rhassoul clay is better on oily or acne-prone skin, while a milder one like kaolin or rose clay is ideal on sensitive skin," Shamban explains. (We like L'Oréal Paris Pure-Clay Mask, Exfoliate & Refine, which has kaolin.)

No matter which type you use, rinse it off while it still feels slightly damp to the touch. "If you wait until the mask dries, it can dehydrate skin," Shamban says. Clay isn't only an all-star facial treatment. "It also helps control an oily scalp," says dermatologist Elizabeth Tanzi, M.D., founder of Capital Laser & Skin Care in Chevy Chase, MD. (Try Carol's Daughter Rhassoul Clay Sulfate-Free Shampoo, \$11.50.)



Baking soda, seaweed, charcoal, and clay are beauty's version of farm-to-table, delivering good, pure nutrients to skin and hair.

CHARCOAL: TIGHTENS PORES AND REDUCES ACNE

In the quest for smooth, clear skin, people are going rather dark. Charcoal has made its way into face washes, scrubs, and masks—and once you get past the weirdness of rubbing a dollop of black goo on your skin, you'll discover that these formulas have real benefits. "If you look at charcoal dust under a microscope, each particle has lots of tiny little holes. When those particles come into contact with your skin, they can attract and absorb dirt, excess oil, and pollutants, which then get whisked away as you rinse," says dermatologist Heather Woolery-Lloyd, M.D., director of ethnic skin care at the University of Miami Department of Dermatology and Cutaneous Surgery. Doctors admit that while there haven't been studies yet to show exactly how charcoal affects skin, fans of the products say that they help pores appear smaller and calm breakouts. And since charcoal is non-irritating, it's safe on most skin types, though "the ingredient can be drying, so skip it if you have dry skin," notes Tanzi. "Even if you have oily skin, don't use a charcoal cleanser more than a few days a week." Or try a weekly charcoal mask instead: Boscia Charcoal Pore Pudding contains two types of charcoal, including binchotan white charcoal, which helps balance skin's hydration levels.

Powered-by-nature products



L'ORÉAL PARIS
Pure-Clay Mask, Exfoliate & Refine, \$12.99.



BIORÉ
Baking Soda Acne Scrub, \$6.49.



BOSCIA
Charcoal Pore Pudding, \$38.



THE SEAWEED BATH CO.
Lavender Hydrating Seaweed Bath, \$19.99.

SEAWEED: SOOTHES INFLAMMATION

When you're in the ocean and it sloshes up against you, seaweed is a slimy nuisance. But swirled into a beauty product, it's everything you want for your skin. "Seaweed is remarkably rich in vitamins, minerals, and amino acids, so it's ultra-nourishing for all skin types," says Shamban. "It helps the outer layer of skin stay strong and healthy so it can keep out irritants, it calms inflammation, and it delivers antioxidants to protect from damage. It even helps brighten thanks to its high levels of niacinamide." So if your complexion has gone off-kilter lately and is dry, red, or irritated, try dabbing on a serum that contains seaweed twice a day. (We like Skinfix Moisture Boost Serum, \$29.99.) The anti-inflammatory power of seaweed can improve things below your neck, too. If you have eczema, the ingredient relieves the symptoms, particularly itchiness. "Regular use of seaweed-infused products may even help reduce the frequency of eczema flare-ups," notes Shamban, who recommends taking a 10-minute bath a few times a week with a soak that contains seaweed. (Try The Seaweed Bath Co. Lavender Hydrating Seaweed Bath.)

BAKING SODA: GENTLY EXFOLIATES

Beauty D.I.Y.ers have been whipping up their own baking soda-and-water face scrubs for years, noting how well it sloughs skin. So when big brands recently began launching baking soda-based products, a lot of people wondered how they're any different from the homemade versions. As dermatologists explain, the packaged formulas have one key advantage: "Applying pure baking soda to your skin can throw off the pH balance, and over time this can cause skin to become more vulnerable to irritation, dryness, and acne," says Woolery-Lloyd. "A

skin-care product that contains baking soda, on the other hand, will likely be pH balanced to avoid this problem." It'll also be less abrasive than some other naturally based face scrubs. "The ones made with nutshells can cause micro-tears in the skin," explains Woolery-Lloyd. If you're prone to breakouts, baking soda helps buff away the dead skin that can clog pores, so choose a weekly exfoliant that combines the ingredient with salicylic acid, which also helps keep pores clear and reduces pimples' redness and inflammation. A good one is Bioré Baking Soda Acne Scrub.