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Marshmallow Root Can Smooth and Strengthen Your Hair, According to Trichologists

Ariane Resnick, CNC | December 13, 2023



When you think of the word “marshmallow,” chances are the fluffy white candy comes to mind, not an herb. However, marshmallow root has long been used as a medicinal remedy and is now found in many beauty products, particularly hair care formulas.

But what’s so special about marshmallow root, and should you be using it in your own hair care routine? We spoke with two experts to learn more about this fascinating herb and how it can benefit your hair.

MEET THE EXPERT

Meerika Khanna is a trichologist and the CEO & Founder of Rthvi.

Dr. Kimberly Lee is a board-certified facial plastic and reconstructive surgeon.

What Is Marshmallow Root?

Marshmallow, scientifically known as *Althaea officinalis*, is a plant whose root is used to create herbal remedies or cosmetic products. “Marshmallow root contains mucilage, a gel-like substance that imparts slip and detangling properties,” Meerika Khanna explains. “It helps to smooth the hair cuticle and improve manageability,” she adds.

In addition to its mucilage, marshmallow root has additional properties that lend to its usage for hair. “The components of marshmallow root that make it beneficial for hair include polyphenols, which are nutrients packed with antioxidants and help protect the hair and scalp from damage caused by free radicals, promoting hair growth,” Dr. Kimberly Lee says. “Marshmallow root has vitamins A and C and minerals such as zinc and calcium to help nourish the hair follicles and support overall hair health,” Lee says.

1. Boosts Hydration

Marshmallow root’s mucilage content adds hydration and moisture to your hair. “Marshmallow root helps with moisturizing or hydrating hair because of the mucilage content which forms a gel-like substance when it’s mixed with water, serving as a natural humectant which attracts moisture to the hair and forms a protective coat around each strand of hair,” Khanna says.

Khanna says marshmallow root also helps prevent moisture loss. “The mucilage also has a sealing property to help seal moisture into the hair strands and prevent moisture loss,” she explains. This barrier can help hydrate the hair for longer periods. By preventing water loss and dehydration, marshmallow root contributes to optimal hair hydration, which is particularly advantageous for individuals with dry or damaged hair. “

2. Enhances Volume

Marshmallow root can also make your hair appear more dense and voluminous. “Marshmallow root helps with volume indirectly in the sense that it doesn’t weigh down the hair,” Lee says. “Because of this, it makes the hair appear fuller and more voluminous.”

3. Reduces Frizz

The mucilage in marshmallow roots can enhance smoothness and shine by reducing frizz and breakage. “The mucilage enhances the hair’s elasticity, reducing the risk of breakage,” Khanna says. “Its moisture-retaining properties help combat frizz, leaving the hair smoother and more manageable.”

4. Helps Strengthen Hair

Marshmallow root has recently begun to be studied for its ability to help strengthen and grow your hair. “While research on marshmallow root for hair growth and strength is limited, there is a

preliminary study that suggests marshmallow root extract may potentially have a positive impact on head hair growth,”¹ Khanna tells us. “Marshmallow root does help improve hair health, which, in turn, aids in preventing breakage and promotes healthy hair,” she adds.

Despite limited research, Lee explains that the components of marshmallow root are known to be beneficial for hair strength and growth. “Components found in marshmallow roots such as vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants are well-known to promote hair health and wellbeing,” she says. “Antioxidants, for example, help to protect the hair follicles from damage caused by free radicals, contributing to a healthier hair environment. And the mucilage is used in combinations with other beneficial ingredients aimed to improve hair health and scalp conditions.”

5. Aids in Conditioning and Detangling

Our experts also say marshmallow root helps with detangling and conditioning. To use marshmallow root for detangling, both Lee and Khanna recommend making a DIY spray or purchasing products with marshmallow root. “Detangling sprays rich in mucilage and other beneficial components of marshmallow root becomes an effective solution for smoothing out knots and tangles in your hair,” Khanna says. “The mucilage forms a protective layer, retaining moisture and making detangling easier.”

How to Add Marshmallow Root Into Your Hair Care Routine

To add marshmallow root to your hair care routine, you can purchase products that contain it or make your own. If you shop for marshmallow root-infused products, Khanna recommends her Reveal Shine and Smoothing Serum (\$38). “It is a silicone-free shine and smoothing serum that boosts hair hydration, provides hair shine, helps detangle hair, and controls frizz,” she says. “This serum is specially formulated to leverage marshmallow root’s hydrating and detangling benefits, leaving your hair beautifully smooth and manageable.”

To make a marshmallow root rinse, you’ll need the root and water. “A marshmallow root rinse involves boiling marshmallow root in water, cooling it, and using it as a final rinse after shampooing and conditioning to help detangle the hair,” Lee says. If you want to create a leave-in conditioner, Lee suggests mixing the rinse with a conditioner or aloe vera gel.

You can also make a marshmallow root detangling spray yourself. “Start by boiling one to two tablespoons of dried marshmallow root in two cups of water on low heat for approximately 10 minutes,” Khanna says. “Once the mixture has cooled, strain it and transfer the liquid to a spray bottle.”

Precautions and Considerations

When introducing a new ingredient into your hair care regimen, you’ll want to conduct a patch test with it first. This entails applying a tiny amount of the product you’ll be using to a small part of your skin, usually your lower arm or the top of your hand. Wait 24 hours to ensure no reaction occurs; provided one doesn’t, it’s safe to add this to your routine.

Of course, if you are allergic to marshmallow root, the ingredient is not a fit for you. “While marshmallow root is generally considered safe for topical use, individuals who have known allergies to marshmallow or related plants should avoid using products containing marshmallow root for hair care,” Khanna says. “Patients who have allergies to plants in the Malvaceae family, such as hibiscus or mallow, are more likely to have a cross-reactivity with marshmallow root,” Lee adds.

“This could manifest as itchiness, swelling, redness, or skin irritation.”

If you’re pregnant or breastfeeding, it’s often considered best to avoid anything new, and marshmallow is no exception. “When it comes to patients who are pregnant or breastfeeding, there just isn’t enough information or studies researching the safety of marshmallow root during pregnancy or breastfeeding,” says Lee. “It’s best to err on the side of caution and avoid marshmallow root unless used under the guidance of a healthcare professional.”

As with anything, there is always the potential that marshmallow root could interact with prescription drugs. “Any product can potentially interact with other medications, and marshmallow root is no exception in that it could potentially decrease the absorption of other medications in the mucilage content,” Lee warns. “It’s always best to consult with a healthcare professional before using extensive marshmallow root to ensure there’s no interference with drug absorption.”

The Final Takeaway

Marshmallow root has a variety of hair care benefits. The herb is made up of mucilage, polyphenols, vitamins, and minerals that work to strengthen, smooth, and condition your hair. Today, there are several ways to incorporate the ingredient into your routine, from creating DIY rinses to snagging easy-to-use products like Eden Bodyworks’ Almond Marshmallow Hydration Serum (\$10).

While marshmallow root works for all hair types, it’s always best to introduce a new ingredient into your routine cautiously. You should avoid marshmallow root if you have a known allergy to it or its plant family, you’re pregnant or breastfeeding, or you’re taking a drug that could potentially interact with it. Provided marshmallow root is deemed safe for you to use, the results are sure to be sweet.

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