Natural hair care products

Herbal help for your hair

Jenn Farrell

Back in the “good old days,” a woman could turn down a date with the excuse that she had to stay home and wash her hair. It seems comical, but that little white lie made a lot more sense back then.

It wasn’t that long ago that people washed, set, and styled their hair only about once a week, and procedures like dyeing and perms were much less common. Today, walk through any drugstore and behold the explosion in hair care products—there are entire aisles devoted to the practice of washing, conditioning, styling, colouring, blow-drying, and straightening our hair.

And nobody’s happy with the hair they’ve got: straight wants to be curly, curly wants to be straight, and brunette wants to be blonde. We treat our hair with a pretty cavalier attitude, partly because, unlike most of our bodies, it doesn’t feel any pain when we torment it. But that doesn’t mean damage isn’t being done.

In fact, most of our hair woes are caused by doing too much to it. We over-wash oily hair and we over-condition dry hair, we blow-dry and back-comb fine hair to make it appear fuller. The hair and scalp often react by displaying even more of the original problem. It’s no wonder our hair isn’t as healthy looking as we’d like it to be—we can’t leave it alone long enough!

If you’re finding that your hair is dull, frizzy, greasy, or lifeless, it could be a simple matter of over-washing, blow-drying, and using too many chemical styling products. It’s a difficult habit to break, but do try to wean yourself off or at least cut down on some of these practices. By letting your hair find its natural oil balance, you’ll see results that can’t be equalled by any product or styling method.

The next step is to look at the products you’re using. Most of the products
on drugstore shelves are made as cheaply as possible, despite their impressive claims and exotic-sounding ingredients. Even the pricey salon brands are detergent- and petrochemical-based. Many products that call themselves “natural” often only contain minute amounts of actual plant extracts, and those are coupled with harsh detergents like sodium laureth and sodium lauryl sulfates, as well as synthetic fragrances and dyes.

While there is a lot of debate about the possible long-term health consequences of using these sulphate-based detergents, why take chances? At the very least, these harsh ingredients strip your hair and scalp of natural oils and can cause sensitivity or allergic reactions. If you’re looking for quality products with ingredients you can actually pronounce, look no further than your local health food store.

Many health food stores carry a variety of shampoo brands that use herbal and coconut oil-based soaps to clean the hair and scalp. Be patient with these products at first, as you might find that they don’t produce the same abundant lather that your old brand did. You will find that over time these natural shampoos clean the hair effectively without stripping it. You may not even need a separate conditioner. If you do want a conditioner for extra softness or curl control, you can also get safer, plant-based versions. Another benefit of natural brands is the plant oils and extracts they contain. They not only smell fantastic, but possess wonderful healing abilities suited to your specific hair type. Here are a few of the most popular ones:

**Ingredients for Oily Hair**

*Peppermint:* stimulates the scalp; cooling and stimulating.
*Burdock root:* a mild astringent; soothes, adds shine.
*Basil and rosemary:* promotes growth.
*Tea tree:* good treatment for dandruff and “troubled” scalp.
*Ylang-ylang:* relaxing; dandruff treatment.

**Ingredients for Dry Hair**

*Myrrh:* soothes dry scalp and flaking.
*Rose:* tones the scalp without drying.
*Soy and rice proteins:* moisturizes the scalp; conditions dry hair; strengthens.
*Jojoba oil:* softens and nourishes the scalp; stimulates follicles.

**Ingredients for Normal and Fine Hair**

*Chamomile:* very gentle; calming and healing.
Excellent for babies and blondes.

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*Clary sage:* good for all types; good dandruff treatment.
*Lavender:* calming and fresh; excellent for itchiness.
*Rose:* builds fine hair; soothes scalp.
*Lemon:* invigorating; gives golden highlights.

For those fashion-forward types who can’t live without their gel and hairspray, it’s good to know that natural versions of these are available as well. One of the nice things about these products is they wash out easily and don’t weigh the hair down with residue.

But be careful—once you find your perfect combination of natural hair care products, you might need to turn down a date to stay home and wash your hair!

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