

A fresh crop of organic and botanical products and services has arrived on the spa and salon scene. Champagne massages, strawberry facials, sugar scrubs—some of these treatments sound good enough to eat.

By Trisha McMahon



tasteful pampering

If organic foods, plants and herbs are good to put *in* one's body, it seems logical that they'd be good to put *on* one's body as well. That, at least, is the reasoning behind the current wave of services being offered at New York City's beauty meccas. "Until about a decade ago, many spas were stuck in a generic rut, with too many could-be-from-anywhere products," says Susie

Ellis, President of SpaFinder, Inc., a marketing and research company for the salon and spa industry. Today, the trend is farm-to-massage-table (or salon chair) treatments, featuring ingredients that are not only natural, but sound positively edible. Here, a smorgasbord of good-for-you skin, body, nail and hair treatments that nourish and satisfy—minus the calories.





Pumpkins and other members of the squash family are rich in beta-carotene. When applied to the face or body in a scrub, it soothes and restores skin's suppleness.

Citrus fruits, such as lemons, limes and Japanese yuzu, are laden with vitamin C, a natural antioxidant that helps the complexion achieve a beautiful balance—not too dry, not too oily—and radiant glow.



Strawberries, blueberries and pomegranates play a key part in facials nowadays. These and other fruits contain alpha hydroxy acids, which are excellent for stimulating and rejuvenating the skin. Beeswax, by contrast, is renowned for its ability to soothe irritations.

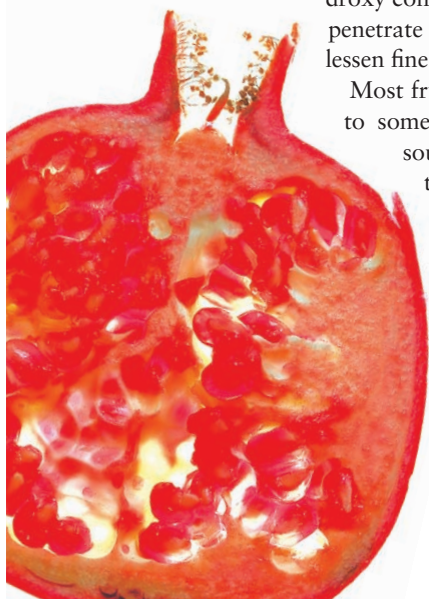


for those with large pores. Like their cousin, the blueberry—which features in the facial’s cleanser—strawberries are also laden with vitamin C, a natural antioxidant, which helps the complexion achieve a beautiful balance between dry and oily.

Overly oily or acne-prone skin often benefits from the balancing properties of beta-carotene—and a prime source for that is pumpkin. **Exhale Spa** (420 Park Ave. So., 1-646-380-5330) features the autumnal gourd in its recently introduced Youth Accelerator Facial. With exfoliating results on a par with that of a dermatologist-strength peel, the active cell-stimulating pumpkin enzymes replenish and restore skin’s suppleness, banishing the appearance of fine lines and skin imperfections.

Complexion Direction “More women, men and teens are coming in for facials. But even before they book, they want to learn about the natural products we use in our services,” says Grace Macnow, owner of **Graceful Spa 56** (240 E. 56th St., Suite 2W, 755-5589). One option, the Nuskin Facial, includes milk, which is not only a great source of skin-strengthening vitamins A and D, but also acts as a gentle exfoliant, thanks to its alpha hydroxy content. This natural acid works to penetrate the outer layer of skin to help lessen fine lines and wrinkles.

Most fruits also contain alpha hydroxy to some degree. One particularly rich source: strawberries, a sought-after ingredient in today’s skin-care products. Applied first in combination with marshmallow in a “cocktail” serum, then with rhubarb in a mask, they figure prominently in the Strawberry Sweet Cheeks Facial at **White Tea Med Spa** (104 W. 14th St., Suite 2C, 647-8919), an ideal treatment



Touching Bases Masseurs and body aestheticians have long used variations of olive or coconut oils in their therapies. But lately, body-wrap, massage and polishing sessions have started featuring a wider range of flavorful ingredients—from sugar and salt (both exfoliants) to soy milk (a collagen stimulant) to honey (an antiseptic) to wine (an antioxidant), offering the ultimate cleansing, soothing and detoxification of the dermis.

At **Go Green Organic Spa** (365 Broome St., 966-3898), the Divine Massage Therapy features a concoction of Champagne and apricot oil. The yeast in Champagne boosts the regeneration of skin cells, while the fragrantly nutty apricot oil is high in fatty acids, which plump up cells to increase moisture retention. Downtown health and beauty oasis **Great Jones Spa** (29 Great Jones St., 505-3185) offers the Pure Fiji Coconut Sugar Glow. A cane-sugar scrub is followed by a massage with macadamia nut oil and coconut milk—a combination that strengthens skin’s elasticity. **Kiehl’s Spa 1851** (157 E. 64th St., 1-888-772-1851) promotes soy milk and honey as part of its Deeply Nourishing Body Polish treatment. And **Serenity Spa** (776 Sixth Ave., 481-7898) utilizes the anti-aging bioflavonoids of grapes. Its Wine Wrap treatment swaddles

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clients in strips of vino-soaked cloth to lessen age spots and refresh dehydrated skin.

Extremity Remedy Ah, the appeal of the pedicure: dipping tired feet into a warm whirlpool of water to soak before being scrubbed, buffed and massaged. Ingredients once associated with candy counters and Japanese restaurants, such as mint, green tea and seaweed, are now commonly used in pedicures. During the Peppermint Sea Twist Pedicure given at the **Dyanna Body & Nail Salon** (40 E. 21st St., 995-2355), oils made of peppermint and seaweed extract are rubbed into the lower extremities, providing antibacterial, antifungal and deep hydrating effects on the skin.

Natural ingredients also give a hand to the hands. At the **Shizuka New York Spa** (7 W. 51st St., Suite 6, 644-7400), the Nagomi Manicure involves bathing the hands in sake-kasu, a nutrient- and antibiotic-rich byproduct of the brewing process for sake (the fermented rice beverage) that's popular in Japan for its skin-brightening qualities. The bath is followed with a massage cream containing the citrus fruit yuzu—a Japanese import with a slight grapefruitlike fragrance. Initially used by the ancients to ward off colds (it's high in vitamin C, like oranges), yuzu adds a stimulating, nourishing perk to the manicure's treatment.

Mane Ingredients For thousands of years, argan oil—made from the essence of kernels of argan trees, which are exclusive to

southwest Morocco—has been used in the pursuit of health and beauty. Often packaged as Moroccan Oil, argan extract is a major contender for the crown of best scalp and hair remedy on the market today. State-of-the-art hair salons such as **Salon Ziba** (200 W. 57th St., 767-0577) recognize the many benefits of the oil. “Our Scalp Treatment with Moroccan Oil turns around damaged hair,” says Alonso Salguero, the salon's co-owner. “Although it's an oil, it's not oily and doesn't weigh down the hair, plus it is excellent for the scalp.” With properties that fight bacteria, Moroccan Oil exfoliates the scalp, aids in cell repair and fortifies hair against breakage.

Jane Webb, owner of **Grace Heaven Salon** (226 E. 3rd St., 253-5490), promotes the use of cacao and other herbs and plants in her treatments and styling products. “High-quality essential oils, from florals to herbs, are the most powerful and incredibly healing,” she says. For coloring, old-fashioned henna is making a comeback. Derived from the leaf of the henna tree, it's a good chemical-free alternative to artificial dyes, if somewhat limited. “I wouldn't use it to cover gray,” cautions Webb: If the henna's not completely pure, there's a risk of it turning the hair a bright marigold-orange.

Organic ingredients can be a boon not just in hair growth, but in hair removal. All-natural beeswax is the premier depilatory used at **European Wax Center** (1577 First Ave., 288-8088), for example. Not only does it yield consistently smooth results, the substance that honeycombs are made of has anti-inflammatory and antibiotic properties, and an inherently soothing effect on rashes and skin irritations (a definite advantage, given the sensitive body parts involved in waxing).

By offering these mouthwatering organic and plant-based services, New York City spas have “carved out a unique identity that makes traveling to them worthwhile,” says Susie Ellis. And the benefits don't have to end when the visit does. “Clients can continue to keep hair and scalp healthy between salon treatments with our complete line of take-home products,” remarks Salon Ziba's Salguero. Elite retailers such as **Carnegie Hill Chemists** (1842 Second Ave., 987-5497) also carry bushels of hair, skin, nail and body lines, containing everything from honey and cranberry to grapefruit and sugar, from such brands as Dr. Hauschka. So, travelers can easily stay on a natural path once home. Just don't nibble the pumpkin scrub en route.



Great Jones Spa's tropical décor is a fitting backdrop for its body treatments, which feature cane-sugar scrubs and macadamia-nut oils.