

## SOAP, PERFUMERY & COSMETICS

### February column

Anthony C. Dweck

#### THE COMPUTER AGE

As we move into the new millennium, I have the distinct impression that people are looking for something different and expecting more from the next thousand years. The big debate is now centred on what to call this new era. Having had the stone age, the iron age and the bronze age, questions are being asked whether we should call this period of our evolution the computer age. As I stare at a my screen surrounded in pink and yellow post-it notes with this week's tasks (it looks like a very big square daisy and I have even been sad enough to alternate the colours of the petals), I wonder why we should want to remember this time in our lives by something most of us curse at least once a day!

#### CHINESE NEW YEAR

I was thinking of throwing my lot in with the Chinese, because they are not celebrating their millennium yet. So it was with great anticipation that I booked my reservation at the Chef Peking for Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> February, the day of the first full moon that dictates the time of their celebrations. I was more than a little upset to discover, that the owner had moved Chinese New Year forward a couple of days, because he always has plenty of customers on a Saturday, but Monday is always quiet. It seems that even my friend of many years has developed marketing strategies that fall a little short of ethical.

#### Chinese Medicinal Plants

As we move from the year of the rabbit and into the year of the dragon, I was taking a look of the wealth of information that is now filling the bookshelves about TCM (or Traditional Chinese Medicine). A few years ago, one would have been hard pressed to find anything on this subject, but happily today the situation is much improved.

My surprise is, that there are no ranges that utilise this wealth of knowledge. It is true that Green Tea (*Thea viridis*), Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*) and Liquorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra* or *G. uralensis*) are present in a whole variety of products, but there exist many others, which would have equal appeal. Thinking of food, I make the following suggestions as suitable ingredients.

#### Banana (*Musa paradisiaca*)

Strictly speaking, we should be talking about the cooking banana (*M. paradisica* var, *sapientum*), which like the sweeter-tasting cousin contains noradrenaline and serotonin. It is the sun-dried skin (known as Da Jiao Pi) that offers some interesting skin benefits, such as soothing insect bites and other pruritic or itching conditions.

### **Mung Bean (*Phaseolus radiatus*)**

There are a number of varieties of mung bean, which incidentally are allowed to germinate and form short shoots called bean sprouts. Both the beans and the sprouts should be eaten to treat boils, sores, swellings and other skin conditions, since this plant is seen as heat dissipating and detoxifying. For external use, mung beans can powdered dry and then made into a paste with water. Other plants can also be added at this time to target specific skin conditions, however this mask on its own is excellent for reducing excess sebum that is often responsible for blackheads and acne. Another reference cites powdered mung bean for the treatment of minor burns and scalds.

### **Adzuki Bean (*Phaseolus angularis* or *Vigna angularis*)**

A closely related bean is the adzuki, and once again this can be ground to a powder and mixed with a little honey to treat carbuncles and swellings.

### **Potato (*Solanum tuberosum*)**

Even the common potato is of use in skin treatment. The potato is cut and squeezed to remove as much juice as is possible and mixed with a small amount of vinegar. This solution is said to be an excellent relief for mumps and can be applied as a soothing lotion to burns and erythema.

### **Bean Curd (Tofu) or *Soya max***

These beans can be crushed and the beans applied to erysipelas (those infections caused by *Streptococci*, that causes a hot, red rash and is often oedematous). The poultice is allowed to dry and then removed. This would also make an excellent face mask.

### **Guava (*Psidium guajava*)**

The leaves are rich in tannin and also have antiseptic properties. In Chinese medicine, the fresh leaf juice is applied to injuries to stop them from bleeding. The fresh fruit is boiled in decoction to form a wash that is used on haemorrhoids, eczema, pruritic skin conditions and heat rash.

## VALENTINE'S DAY

As it is also Valentine's Day this month and a time for romance, I would add one final Chinese herb for him, which is *Hydrocotyle asiatica minor* or Fo Ti Tieng. This should be taken daily (two tablespoons in a cup of hot water) and will have an accumulative benefit on a lagging libido.

For her, I would recommend Vanilla beans (*Vanilla planifolia*), which though not of Chinese origin (it is from South America), might bring some pleasure early on in this New Year! "The Comtesse du Barry (mistress of Louis XV of France) is said to have made extensive use of vanilla beans to keep her many lovers always ready to receive her." (a quote from Dr. Cynthia Watson: Love Potions - a guide to aphrodisiacs).