

## **FINAL DRAFT**

### **ARTICLE FOR SOAP PERFUMERY AND COSMETICS**

#### **EVENING PRIMROSE - THE GIFT OF NATURE**

**by Anthony C.Dweck**  
**Technical Director of Peter Black Toiletries**

There is a plant that grows wild by the roadside, on railway embankments and seaside places, wherever the ground is poor, that is one of the most miraculous gifts of Nature.

In some places it is known as the Evening Star, in France it is the "Beauty of the Night", in Germany it is the "Virginian Night Candle". It is also known as Moth Blossom and Night Opener, but we know *Oenothera biennis* better as the Evening Primrose. It should be pointed out that this biennial plant is in no way related to the Primrose of the Primulaceae family.

The flowers of this graceful plant open between six and seven in the evening, the petals emitting a gentle phosphorescence and a subtle but delicious fragrance.

The plant originates from North America and was first introduced into Europe in 1619 in the Padua Botanic Garden. It possibly made its way into England at an earlier date and was probably introduced by John Tredecant, who was gardener and herbalist to Queen Elizabeth I. The plant has proliferated, because it is one of the few that not only survives, but actually thrives in poor conditions. Such conditions exist in old quarries, and it is surprising to learn, that one of the larger growers (until quite recently) was R.M.C., who turned their redundant sites into profitable Evening Primrose crop growing areas.

This plant is a relatively modern discovery and so there is no mention made of the plant by Culpeper, Gerard and Dioscorides. A reference made by Theophrastus more likely refers to a species of *Epilobium*.

The whole plant is edible, particularly the fleshy root which is cooked in vinegar and oil to make a soup. All parts of the plant have medicinal value, though the emphasis of modern research has been with the oil obtained from the cold pressing of the seeds.

The aqueous extract produced from the infusion of either the whole plant or the leaves, has astringent and demulcent properties. The plant contains tannins, mucilage, some bitter substances and resins, as well as potassium salts.

It has found greatest service in the treatment of gastric disorders and liver problems. It also has benefit in colds, coughs and asthma. Applied externally as an ointment, or used as a poultice, the whole plant has benefit as a wound healing agent, or vulnerary, and may be used to treat skin eruptions and minor cuts.

The major component, however, is the seed oil, which has proved of immense importance both internally and externally.

It contains essential fatty acids (EFA), of which two are of particular importance - gamma linoleic

acid (GLA) and linoleic acid. The beneficial effects of Evening Primrose oil could well be related to affording a precursor of the prostaglandins for those individuals whose enzymatic conversion of linoleic acid to GLA is deficient.

It is almost certain that it is these vital materials in the body which help in the growth and reproduction of cells. Certainly, an EFA deprivation can lead to eczema-like lesions, hair loss, defective connective tissue synthesis leading to poor wound healing and also failure of the immune function to respond normally to infection.

The published data comes from many learned papers, including those from the Lancet and the leading teaching hospitals. The existence of three pharmaceutically licensed products bears testimony to the importance of the oil.

One product is specific for breast pain (Efamast), another incorporates lithium and is specific for seborrhoeic dermatitis (Efalith), whilst the third is for atopic eczema (Epogam). The major proportion of all these products is Evening Primrose Oil.

The literature is quite emphatic on the specific benefits to the skin of Evening Primrose Oil and reports on the use of the material for psoriasis, skin eruptions, aging skin and general skin dryness. It is also cited for ichthyosis with marked pruritis. Little wonder, that Evening Primrose is carving a well deserved place in skin care and toiletry ranges.

The oil produces a profound effect in reducing the water loss through the skin, though this is not thought to be a function of occlusivity. It is more likely, that it is a factor of the epithelial phospholipid structure. The skin smoothing ability of the oil is the subject of a patent held by Efamol Holdings.

The story would not be complete without mentioning some of the other distressing conditions, where Evening Primrose Oil has proved of immense value.

It is of undoubted value in PMT (pre-menstrual tension), which apart from the proof reflected by product sales, was the subject of a conclusive study by St. Thomas's Hospital in 1981.

The second condition is that of MS (multiple sclerosis), where considerable research is taking place. At the moment, the results are not conclusive, but do show some promise.

Patients with rheumatoid arthritis were clinically tested and well over half experienced an improvement after taking EPO.

There is no doubt, that the benefits of Evening Primrose are real, but it raises two provoking thoughts. What else will the investigation of this material reveal? This is only one plant, what would be discovered if other plant materials were investigated with such thoroughness?

The article length does not permit a reference list or a comprehensive list of suppliers, but may be obtained from the author on request.

Suppliers of Evening Primrose oil capsules  
(Soft gel) Efamol Ltd, Woodbridge Meadows, Guildford,  
Surrey GU1 1BA

(Hard gel) Encap Ltd, 4 Dunlop Square, Livingston,  
West Lothian EH54 8SB, Scotland