

BEAUTY

Edited by Suzanne Harrison suzanne.harrison@scmp.com

NURTURE BY NATURE

Organic goods have swamped beauty store counters, but as Camilla Chafer explains, not all labels are created equal

WITH ORGANIC FOOD growing in popularity, it's no surprise that organic products are now the fastest-growing sector in the beauty industry.

Some 2,000 organically labelled products have hit the shelves in the past two years, according to a survey by market researcher Mintel. But can these organic products out-do their established rivals?

Critics of the additives and preservatives in common, everyday products say they can. "Consumers have a right to products that are safe, but they also expect them to be effective," says Traci Lewis, business development manager with British-based Soil Association Certification. "With so many people now eating organic food, there's huge potential for a wide range of organic beauty products to be developed."

Most people probably assume that organic means precisely that: freshly grown produce, free from pesticides and preservatives whipped up into an environmentally sound and healthy concoction. But that's often not the case. Products can easily be passed off as organic, even if they don't meet standards. But the Soil Association's Ecocert label guarantees a product's authenticity.

Labels boasting that products are pure or natural or carry other such claims are sometimes designed to confuse people into thinking that they're more natural than they actually are.

"Unless a product is certified by the Soil Association or other national certifying body, there's no guarantee that it's organic," says Susan Curtis, natural medicines representative at Neal's Yard Remedies. "Any company can call a beauty product organic because, unlike food, there's no law against this for beauty products."

Soil Association guidelines govern what can't be included. It encourages the use of anti-bacterial and natural preservatives in ingre-

"ANY COMPANY CAN CALL A BEAUTY PRODUCT ORGANIC BECAUSE, UNLIKE FOOD, THERE'S NO LAW AGAINST IT"

Susan Curtis Neal's Yard Remedies

dients. It bans parabens (preservatives with anti-mould properties), petrochemicals and genetically modified produce.

Products must be at least 70 per cent organic to gain the seal of approval. A small number of chemicals are allowed (for a list of what's approved, go to www.soilassociation.org/healthandbeauty).

If the ingredients include a high proportion of floral or vegetable products or extracts rather than chemicals, chances are that its rea-

sonably organic. A sell-by date also indicates a high natural quota with limited preservatives. Ecocert labels are found on ecological and organic products. Guidelines require total plant ingredients to be at least 95 per cent organically sourced.

Although a small number of synthetics that can't be organically produced are acceptable, no synthetic fragrances and dyes are allowed in Ecocert-certified products. About 1,000 products around the world carry the label. Using organic rather than synthetic products benefits the environment. And it helps your skin by not loading it with products that it either can't break down or have side-effects.

"Organic products are healthier products," Curtis says. "They contain ingredients that are grown without chemical fertilisers and pesticides. This means they contain less chemical contaminants."

"There's more and more information coming out all the time about just how damaging trace chemicals are to the body, especially in the toxic-cocktail effect. Certified organic products also have a strict list of every ingredient that's allowed in a product, so

they're also less likely to contain dubious chemical ingredients. For example, parabens aren't allowed." Parabens have been found in cancerous breast tissue and, although no link has yet been proved, some researchers warn against their use.

If you thought formaldehyde was for Damien Hirst and his ilk or morgues, you may be surprised to learn that it's used in products ranging from foam baths to deodorants and lipsticks. It's said to be carcinogenic and bad for asthmatics. Similarly, phthalates - often used in perfumes and creams - in high doses are said to be responsible for internal and reproductive disorders in both sexes.

"Health and environmental campaigners have long warned that phthalates threaten fertility," says Helen Lynn, Women's Environmental Network's health co-ordinator. "The European Union has banned two phthalates, DEHP and DBP, from use in cosmetics, but others are still widely used in cosmetics and toiletries. Companies haven't agreed to remove DEP, the phthalate most commonly used in cosmetics, and one of the phthalates linked to birth defects."

"Tests conducted for our report found DEP in 68 per cent of personal care products tested, including deodorant, hair-care products and all the perfumes tested."

Some people's skin can be irritated by mineral oils such as silicon, because it can't be absorbed and remains on the surface. Derivatives from petroleum are also

found in perfumes and as cosmetic colouring. "Synthetic fragrances are among the most common skin sensitisers causing allergies and irritation," Curtis says. "Mineral oil tends to sit on the surface of the skin, blocking pores and contributing to spots and acne."

Sites such as www.strawberrynet.com can help you find certified organic products in Hong Kong. Harvey Nichols sells the Organic Pharmacy range, and organic scent and skin oil range Patyka is available at Joyce Beauty counters.

Avalon Organics stocks a new range that's free of parabens, harsh preservatives and petrochemicals. It doesn't test on animals and conforms to the British Union for the Abolition of Vivisection's humane cosmetics standards. Best-sellers are its lavender-scented skin cleansing gel and Renewal Facial Serum, which smoothes, tones and calms irritant-prone skin. The range (www.avaloncosmetics.com) includes shampoo, conditioner, body lotion and deodorant. In Hong Kong, Avalon is available through Easy Won Trading Development Company (tel: 2374 2313).

Solace Skin Defence Active Day Cream from Barefoot Botanicals (www.barefoot-botanicals.com) is 100 per cent plant and mineral extract. This moisturising, cream has cooling properties such as extracts of aloe vera and green tea with the scent of neroli and geranium. It's recommended for sensitive, dehydrated and wind-chapped skin. Barefoot Botanicals ships to Hong Kong.

Neal's Yard Remedies (www.nealsyardremedies.com) has long embodied the organic ethos. Its Baby Massage Oil with pure essential oils, roman chamomile, rose and lavender is a favourite and doubles as a bath oil. Men might like the nourishing After Shave Balm with aloe vera, lavender, galbanum and yarrow.

Dr Hauschka's reputation has been boosted with endorsements from the likes of Madonna and Kylie Minogue. Although the products aren't 100 per cent organic, they contain many organically or biodynamically grown plants and herbs. Dr Hauschka products can be found at Healing Plants in Lyndhurst Terrace, Central. *Presswire Media*

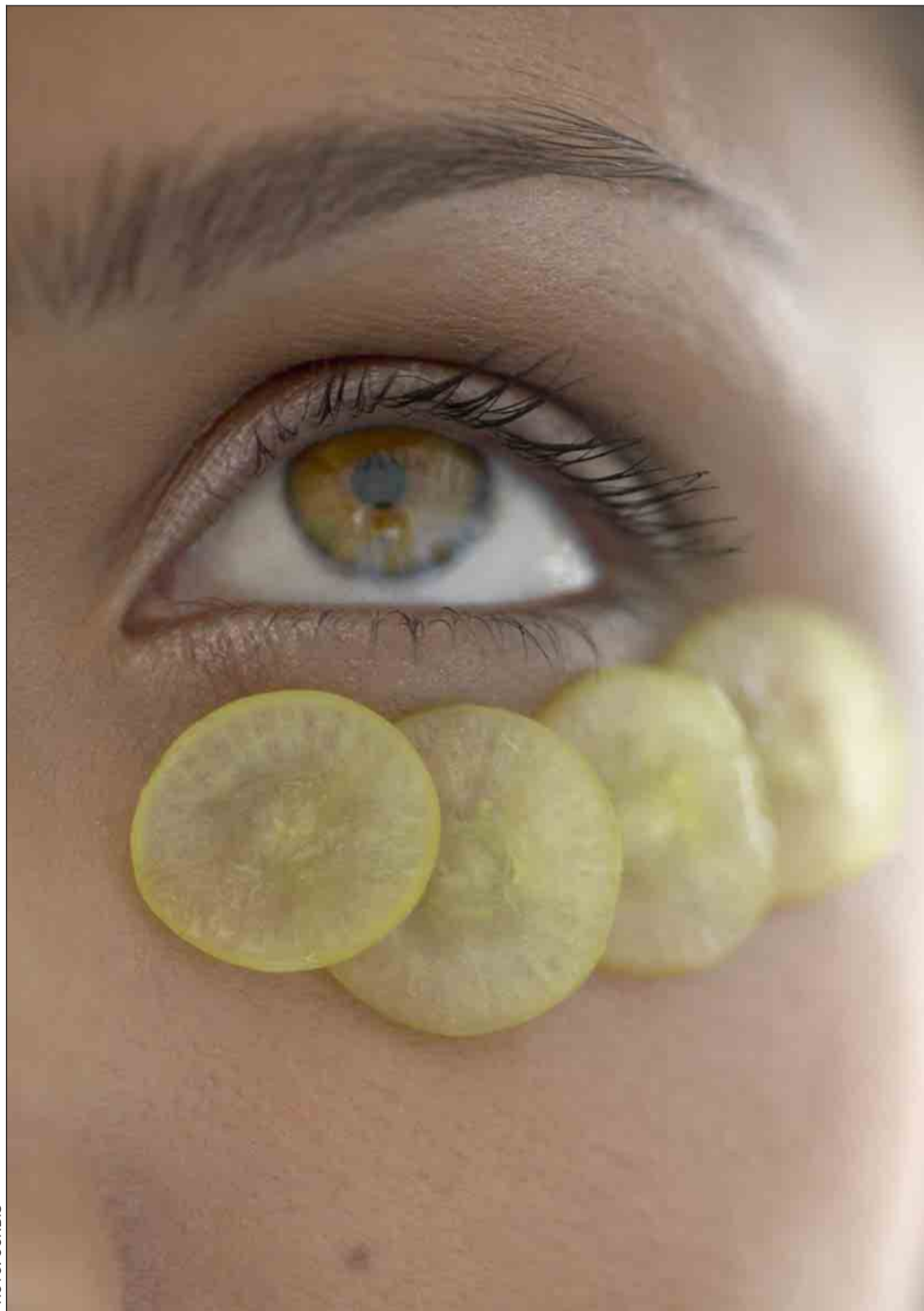


PHOTO: CORBIS

POWDER ROOM

Suzanne Harrison

Scents of spring

Skin-care consultant **Eve Lom** - best known for her cleanser - has expanded her range. Her eponymous moisturiser with SPF15 (\$650/50ml) includes extracts of red, green and white tea (antioxidants), and chestnut and rosemary to protect against environmental damage. An eye serum (\$590/15ml) includes soothing chamomile, a cuticle cream (\$250/7ml) and hand cream with SPF10 (\$320/50ml) contain vitamins A and E to promote softer hands and healthy nails. Available from Joyce Beauty, New World Tower, Times Square, The Gateway Canton Road, Festival Walk and Lane Crawford IFC mall.

Clinique has a new limited-edition spring fragrance called **Happy in Bloom** (\$245/30ml, \$330/50ml). The fresh, floral scent (right) contains hints of white freesia and is said to have a clean and cool feeling.



Available from all Clinique counters.

Love's all very well, but **Bliss** says what you really need right now is gloves. Dry, chapped hands can sink into Bliss' polymer gel-lined blue gloves (\$440), which contain softening agents such as jojoba oil and vitamin E. Apply a rich hand cream, slip on the gloves and leave on for 20 minutes (or, for dry hands, overnight). To keep the gloves clean, turn them inside out, wipe them down with a wet sponge and lay them flat to dry. They can be used up to 50 times. Bliss also has softening socks (\$440) that create a film around the feet "creating an instant moisture barrier" to help alleviate dry skin. Both are available from Lane Crawford Pacific Place and Times Square.

Madina has introduced its **Lip Lock Duo** (\$180) for spring summer. Its two formulas are designed to "work in synergy" with one, double-ended applicator. Apply the creamy colour, wait about two minutes, then apply the top coat to seal for full, glossy lips. Available from Joyce Beauty.



Still haven't got your Valentine a gift? **Prada Parfum's Valentine Coffret** (\$690, above) contains the group's fragrance (80ml bottle), a perfumed bath and shower gel (100ml) and hydrating body lotion (100ml). Key ingredients in the Prada fragrance are Indian sandalwood oil and patchouli leaves. Available from shop 1060, IFC Mall, Harvey Nichols and Lane Crawford, Ocean Terminal.

For the ultimate indulgence, plan a couple's spa treatment any time throughout February with the **Rose Romantic Escape** package (\$3,100 per person), a treatment that lasts for two hours and 50 minutes and combines rose-petal champagne, a foot ritual with rose petals, a body scrub and massage, and ends with a facial. Available from the Mandarin Oriental Landmark spa. Inquiries: 2132 0011.

TRUE OR FALSE

Eiri Aoshima
Executive director OPI Nails

Got it nailed

True
■ Colder weather means dryer, more easily damaged nails.
■ Cuticle oil is recommended in dry weather to strengthen nails and prevent cracked cuticles.

■ Periodic filing of nails and keeping them trimmed properly results in a presentable look.
■ File nails in one direction only



and use a file with a 180-grit or higher (check the packaging).
■ Buff your nails for a natural, shiny look.
■ A good quality hand cream will moisturise nails.

False
■ Nail varnish can damage nails.
■ Professionally applied acrylic nails can damage the nail bed.
■ There's no need for a base coat.
■ There's nothing you can do about hereditary weak nails.
■ Nibbling your nails won't weaken them.

Keeping You Posted!



37% of South China Morning Post readers

regularly read our "Financial/Investment News"

NO.1 FOR ANY NEWSPAPER IN HONG KONG

100 years with all the right numbers

For more information about our readers and why you should be reaching them, call us at 2565 2435 or e-mail display@scmp.com

Source: ACNielsen Mid Year Media Index 2003

NEWSPAPER DIVISION OF SCMP GROUP

South China Morning Post

SCIENCE SEEKS THE CHEMICAL TRUTHS

Organic companies say their products don't contain phthalates (pronounced thalates), a potentially harmful substance used in scents and nail varnish. But should you be losing sleep over the chemicals in beauty products?

There are conflicting views. According to research reported in *The New York Times* last year, high levels of exposure to certain phthalates might cause cancer or reproductive-

system abnormalities in laboratory rats and mice.

In 2004, the European Union banned the use of two key phthalates in beauty products. But although nail-polish makers comply with the law, they say that phthalates in beauty products pose no risk to humans. And many scientists agree, the *Times* reported.

"There are real uncertainties about animal studies," says Michael Thun, the head

of epidemiological research at the American Cancer Society. "One, we're dealing with a different species; two, you're extrapolating from a high dose down to low doses."

According to the Phthalates Information Centre, a study last year by Swedish researchers cast doubt on the significance of a US study that found a statistical correlation between phthalate

exposure and sperm quality in men.

"The Swedish study is noteworthy because, on the face of it, it's a more thorough piece of work than the American study," says Marian Stanley, manager of the Phthalate Esters Panel.

"It studied more subjects than the American team did. And its subjects were more representative of the general population of young males." *Suzanne Harrison*