

TREND WATCH | Argan Oil

Is a popular Moroccan elixir the next breakthrough in skin care?



Goats feast on Argan fruit.



A Berber woman presses Argan seeds.

EVERY DECADE OR SO, THE BEAUTY INDUSTRY NAMES A new “liquid gold.” In the 1980s, it was jojoba oil, a superior moisturizer and surefire wrinkle fighter. The new superstar ingredient claiming the crown has been around for centuries: Argan oil.

The difficulty in obtaining this fountain of youth adds to its luxe reputation—and hefty price tag. The oil is produced by the seeds of the Argan tree, which only grows in a 10,000-square-mile region of southwestern Morocco. The seeds must be harvested, shelled, ground, strained and pressed to produce the oil. It can take up to a week to yield one liter.

Local goats, however, often complicate matters. The tree-climbing critters excrete the seed after feasting on the Argan fruit. Indigenous Berber women then retrieve the seeds, clean them and put them through the same process. The women rely on sales of this oil as their primary source of income and have formed government-sanctioned co-ops to retain their independence.

Argan oil is high in essential fatty acids and vitamin E. It's safe for all skin types—hydrating for dry, clarifying for oily—and is purported to treat a range of ailments from acne to burns to diaper rash. Moroccans rub it on their skin, hair and scalp; and eat it mixed in salad dressing or spreads. “Argan oil is to this decade what the discovery of extra virgin olive oil was to the early '80s in America. I think we'll look back in 10 years and wonder how we ever lived without it,” says Kelli Colaco, spokesperson for Alili (alilimorocco.com), a line of authentic Moroccan products, including pure Argan oil.

Skincare manufacturers are beginning to add Argan to creams, serums, moisturizers and lip balms. Babor (babor.com), Darphin (darphin.com), Aveda (aveda.com), Sundāri (sundari.com) and Eden Allure (edenallure.com) are a few of the brands now infusing their products with the imported ingredient.

Here's how some day spas are beginning to utilize it in treatments:

Takashimaya New York (takashimaya-ny.com) offers an Argan Facial (70 min./\$150) as one of its most popular antiaging therapies. After cleansing, exfoliation and extractions, the face is massaged with an Argan cream. “It's excellent for sensitive skin and dryness, and it repairs collagen fibers,” says Irina Pugachevsky, the spa's lead esthetician. “It's different than anything else on the market. People are only just starting to learn about it, but what's worked for centuries can't be wrong.”

Maryland's **About Faces Day Spa & Salon** (aboutfacesdayspa.com) utilizes a lip balm rich in Argan oil as a finishing touch after facials. “We often neglect the lips,” says Nancy Bridge, retail manager for the spa's five locations. “People love it. Argan is ultrahydrating, and it works to naturally plump skin.” Bridge says the spa also likes supporting the communities that produce it. “It's a great cause. We're taking from their region for our advancement, but we know we're giving right back,” she says.

Frenchy's Day Spa & Beauty Boutique (frenchysdayspa.com) in Seattle also uses Argan oil as a post-treatment application. Following body treatments—particularly scrubs—therapists slather clients with a cream containing the oil. “It's still fairly new, but guests seem to love it. It leaves the skin softer than you can imagine,” says assistant manager Emily Ryan.

Rather than using a product infused with it, therapists at **Blu Water Day Spa** (bluwaterdayspa.com) in Kensington, Maryland, customize treatments with pure Argan oil. They layer it with creams, use it during massage or apply it as a full-body moisturizer. “We also use it in our Ayurvedic treatments to help the healing process,” says Teresa Hinton, V.P. of operations and training.

“I like products that kill a few birds with one stone, and Argan oil does that. It reduces irritation, smoothes the skin, and is a super antiaging and antioxidant ingredient,” she adds. “It's antiseptic, good for blemishes, rosacea, eczema and psoriasis, heals sunburns and is hypoallergenic. There's no one who wouldn't benefit from using this oil. It's almost too good to be true.” —*H.W. Rudolph*

