

The Seaweed Lady touts skin-care benefits of B.C.'s coastal species



Seafloa founder Diane Bernard created a line of algae-packed serums and body gels.

Thanks to the city's enviable sushi scene, Vancouverites get plenty of seaweed in their diets. But did you know that the superfood—long lauded and consumed daily by the Japanese for its nutritional benefits—does wonders for the skin, too?

In fact, the Japanese have employed species of the algae in their skin-care regimens for centuries to help cleanse and hydrate while fighting signs of aging. Here in B.C., **Seafloa** founder Diane Bernard has been doing the same for the past 15 years. Now affectionately known as the “Seaweed Lady”, the Vancouver Island resident worked as a seaweed harvester and supplier for restaurants around Canada before realizing that the plant's sought-after properties—high concentrations of iron, antioxidants, fibre, and other health-boosting nutrients—could also benefit the skin.

“A chef introduced me to these products at a spa. It was a marine-based skin-care line,” she explains by phone. “I just had this aha moment.”

The products that Bernard encountered were from a European brand, and, according to her, included minimal traces of actual seaweed. (“It was white, sterile, and perfume-y,” she recalls.) So the self-described “third-generation seaweed character” (her family are Acadians who worked regularly with the plant) set out to develop her own line of algae-packed skin care that would harness the healing, regenerative powers of the 600-plus varieties on B.C.’s coastline, which, unbeknownst to some, is one of the healthiest in the world. “I do seaweed tours and people are often agog with the diversity of it, the size of it, the colours of it,” Bernard explains.

Fastforward 15 years and Bernard’s sustainably produced Seaflora has become a favourite among those looking for a natural, certified-organic alternative for bright, youthful-looking skin. Manufactured in Sooke, with the assistance of chemists and skin-care professionals, the 30-product line includes serums that are said to help reduce fine lines and wrinkles, nourishing body gels, and exfoliators that gently slough off dead skin cells to reveal a radiant glow.

All of them use high concentrations of seaweeds like bull kelp and rockweed that have been hand-harvested from the ocean and shoreline. They’re also free of parabens, petroleum, and other toxins.

What makes seaweed such a skin-care powerhouse is its physical evolution, Bernard adds. A precursor to land plants, the algae absorb nutrients from the ocean water directly into their blades rather than through roots. This prevents the kind of loss or lessening of nutrients that typically occurs between root and leaf in land plants. “They take in copious amounts of vitamins,” says Bernard. “And they have really high antioxidants, which are vitamins A, E, and C. They have over 60 trace mineral elements, which are all highly prized in skin care.”

At the **2018 Wellness Show**, Vancouverites will be able to see and sample Seaflora’s whole collection. In addition, the Seaweed Lady will be giving a talk on the Women and Wellness Seminar Stage

that outlines the health and beauty benefits of seaweed and why the plant continue to captivate her after all this time. “It’s been an exciting 15 years for me,” she says.

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