



LIVE FAST, DIE OLD

In Asia, herbs have been used for centuries to treat everything from insomnia to back pain. Can the same ancient cure-alls also deliver perfect skin? By April Long

THE CHI GENERATION

Herb-based Asian skin care, like TCM itself, is all about balance. In theory, when the yin (cool energy) and yang (hot energy) are equal, the body's life force, or chi, flows most efficiently. Skin types and conditions are therefore classified according to excesses of yin or yang: "Hot" skin is generally prone to acne or irritation, while a dull, lackluster complexion would be considered "cool." While some of the ultraspecific concepts might sound disconcertingly peculiar to a Western ear—the TCM notion of "nourishing the blood," for example, or pretty much anything to do with the spleen—the fundamentals relate directly to the way we already think about our skin; only the terminology is different.

"Something like yin deficiency sounds esoteric, but it really just means the skin is dry and inflamed," says New York-based acupuncturist and herbalist Jill Blakeway. "Blood stagnation means you have poor circulation, which can lead to things like dark circles under your eyes. Water accumulation, which we call *damp* in Chinese medicine, means you're puffy where you shouldn't be. And chi deficiency is the lack of elasticity. It's pretty straightforward: You would use herbs that 'heat,' increase blood flow, if you had circulatory problems and you wanted to get things moving, and you would use herbs that 'cool,' or have anti-inflammatory properties, if you had problems with inflammation."