Tea as makeup, cleanser and more—and how to create concoctions on your own

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Sipping tea is part of the daily routine for many of us, whether we do it for its taste, its health benefits or some other valid reason. But in recent years, we’ve witnessed more and more evidence of tea’s uses beyond the cup. We’ve certainly seen (and tasted) tea leaves and extractions of the leaves used in culinary and baking recipes in fine-dining establishments, cafés and in tea-themed cookbooks. And mixologists have been experimenting with tea as an ingredient for years: Tea-infused cocktails are now quite trendy, with liquor brands such as Firefly Vodka, Seagram and Tiffin among those infusing spirits with *Camellia sinensis*. Sit at any chic bar and you’re bound to find at least one cocktail on the menu that includes tea in its description.

But tea’s ties to healthfulness have helped broaden its reach to arenas outside the cup, kitchen and bar. Not only has the vitamin culture latched on to the movement by hawking tea-laced pills of every size, shape and intended remedy, but the pharmaceutical industry is churning out tea-based medicines and cures while the diet supplement industry touts tea as the new, magic gut-busting bullet. Even Dr. Oz, America’s self-appointed general practitioner, encourages tea consumption for everything from weight loss to stress relief, and he regularly hails the health benefits of the leaf.

That desire to incorporate tea into our lives has led to its appearance in myriad products, from beauty wares to cleaning supplies—and much in between. Here is a sampling of some of the ways tea is moving outside of our morning sipping rituals to join us in other facets of our lives.

**BEAUTY IN TEA, TEA IN BEAUTY**

Tea has featured prominently in an ever-increasing number of commercial beauty products and DIY concoctions of late, including skin cleansers, toners, creams and scrubs, lip balms, shampoos, conditioners, toothpastes and mouth rinses. You’ll even see tea in spray moisturizers, sunscreens and insect repellents—the list goes on and on.

The humble tea leaf has seemingly become the answer to all that ails and vexes—here are some specific maladies and the tea creation that can fix them:

**BAD BREATH.** Dr. Ken’s, Dr. Sharp and Nature’s Gate toothpastes are all made with tea, while Dr. Ken’s also markets a green tea dental floss. While a cool cup of tea on its own can act as an excellent rinse, there’s always Listerine or Colgate mouthwash—both made with tea. And if you forget your toothbrush, a stick of Mentos fresh mint chewing gum featuring green tea extract can serve as a quick breath freshener.

**DRY SKIN.** I recommend searching the Web for endless DIY recipes for tea-infused face and body creams. No time to whip up homemade batches? No worries, the commercial choices are endless: Alba Botanica, Bulgari, L’Occitane and Olay are among the most recognizable brands. Even men have a sizeable skin-care selection culled from the leaf, including Anthony Logistics eye cream and Lucky Tiger and Kyoku face moisturizers. Meanwhile, eShave and Provence Santé shaving creams and CK One cologne are all made with green tea.

**TOUCHING UP.** The cosmetic world is enamored of tea. Jane Iredale makes a foundation using tea, while Laura Geller of QVC fame offers an entire line including blushes, eye shadows and eyeliners employing green tea extract. And you can remove it all with more of the same: Burt’s Bees and Basis manufacture gentle cleansing cloths made with green tea. There are even green tea nail strengtheners made by Sally Hansen, Nutra Nail and Sephora brands for a healthy mani-pedi.

**PUFFY EYES.** These can be cured by placing steeped, cooled tea bags over the eyes and leaving them there a while. The caffeine helps constrict the blood vessels under the eyes, reducing the puffiness. It also feels great. Prefer a commercial product made with tea? Many options are available, including creams from Teamine, Origins and Elizabeth Arden.

**FOOT ODOR.** Here’s a surefire stink-be-gone home remedy: Sprinkle a tea-talc concoction in your odiferous sneakers. Use dry, unused or spent tea leaves, or the contents of old or spent tea bags—any variety will suffice. A mix of three-quarters tea and one-quarter baby powder or body talc should do the trick. Don’t forget to discard the blend before wearing them again! The astringent tannins in the leaves will even dry up sweaty, smelly feet (according to Dr. Oz). Just soak in an antibacterial black tea brew each day for a few weeks or as needed. For a commercial option that incorporates tea in the mix, check out Solay Wellness. Elizabeth Arden and Kiss My Face include deodorants with tea in their extensive product lines.

**DULL MANE.** Pour cool tea on hair and leave it for 10 minutes. Rinse it, then shampoo and condition as usual. It’s believed that black tea can reduce breakage and green tea stimulates hair growth, but either will add a nice sheen. Some commercial sham-
poos and conditioners made with tea include Burt’s Bees, Aubrey Organics, Paul Mitchell and Dove.

CHAPPED LIPS. Dr. Oz recommends using a cooled tea bag on the lips to soothe the cracks and mend the skin. If you’d like something more portable, the ChapStick brand, Blistex and even my company, SerendipiTea, offer lip balms made with tea.

THE LEAF EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK

Moving from full body care to the larger external realm, tea is playing prominent roles in, well, just about everywhere, including:

HOME CLEANING SUPPLIES. Did you know that black tea cleans windows quite effectively? And because tea is a bactericide, we’re advised that mopping floors, wiping kitchen tables, and even cleaning countertops and cutting boards with spent tea leaves is highly effective. And it’s an easy enough solution to make on
your own: Simply keep a spray bottle full of a strong brew. Have you ever noticed the wait staff in Asian restaurants pouring leftover tea from the cups directly onto the table before giving it a good wipe? The tannins in the tea help clean wood and bring out the shine.

If you want to go the commercial route, J.R. Watkins makes many useful household products with tea, including window cleaners, all-purpose cleaners, wipes and even room fresheners.

**EASY POTPOURRI.** Home needs a little refreshing? Place a bowl of dry tea leaves in your pantry, refrigerator, closets or basement. The leaves are extremely porous and will absorb odors and moisture. Prefer a quick spritz? Dash down to the supermarket to pick up one of the many room fresheners that include tea, such as Glade or Febreze.

**MAKING PAPER.** For all crafty folk, tea-dye cloth and paper are easily achieved. For cloth (only natural cloth will do), prepare a large batch of black or green tea—four cups per yard of fabric is the usual benchmark. Steep the clean cloth in the batch, the longer the darker. Rinse quickly under cold water, then fix the color in a quick vinegar bath. Hand-wash to preserve the color. For paper, steep a cup of black or green tea. Preheat the oven to 200 degrees. Place a piece of paper in a baking sheet, then pour the cooled tea around the corners so the liquid pools and seeps into and over the entire paper. Pour off the excess liquid before putting the paper into the oven for about five minutes or until the edges start to curl. No time? Etsy features many designers working with this DIY look—you’re just a click away from antiquity.

**TEA AS PAINT.** For those with a creative flare, set up the easel and paint with homemade tea pigments—noteable artists working
with this medium are Gerard Tonti of Pittsburgh and Carne Griffiths in the United Kingdom. A quick Web search will lead you to many tutorials on painting with tea. Seems it’s only a matter of time before commercial nontoxic tea-based paints and stains hit the market.

**IN THE YARD.** Moving outdoors, for all the gardeners reading, don’t forget to add used or old tea leaves to the compost bin to act as soil-enriching fertilizers, mulch or fill. Tea is high in nitrogen and also contains many minerals that plants crave. When potting, spread a layer of spent leaves at the bottom to assist with drainage—the roses and tomatoes in particular will show great appreciation. The leaves, when sprinkled around the base of plants and mixed in with the Earth, are also known to keep pests such as snails and slugs at bay. Leftover tea in the pot? Add it to the watering can for later use and watch your garden grow.

**USEFUL IN SO MANY WAYS**

The great news is there is no reason to discard older tea leaves at your shop or tea bags that are lingering in the back of your pantry. Relegate these to the utility cabinet and employ them in one of the DIY suggestions above. And the even more exciting news is that this is just the tip of the iceberg and there’s no telling how deep the water is! Dare we say, all we need is tea?