

TING...
TESTING...



GARDENERS' HAND CREAMS

Yemm uses all her senses to try out some of the many lotions and potions about



THE FRAGRANT GARDENER'S Hand Lotion (100g pot) £6.50
Made by a small family firm who specialise in making goat's milk soap as a balm for psoriasis. The cream is the most fragrant in the Gardener's range. The lotion is almost scentless and absorbed far more quickly than most (presumably less perfume, but I preferred the lotion, in my opinion, no-fuss pump bottle). To order, tel: +44 (0)1948 666550. www.natural-skin-care.com



HAFOD Gardeners' Hand Cream (50ml jar) £5.95
Made in a workshop on Anglesey, this gardeners' hand cream is laced with coconut butter and patriotically Welsh. The ingredients are very 'green', including comfrey, and the cream smells wholesomely of lavender and tea tree oil, which is well known for its anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties. The scent is clear without being overwhelming. It also has a nice, neat (stocking-filler sized) pot that won't clutter a bedside table. For stockists, tel: +44 (0)770 462 4523. www.dragonbalm.co.uk



NATURE'S NECTAR Gardeners' Hand Cream (110ml pot) £8.95
This pleasant cream with natural oils (lavender is discernible in the fresh smell) also contains beeswax and manuka honey from New Zealand. Manuka honey is causing a bit of a stir at the moment, because it is believed to have anti-bacterial properties, which are being tested in the treatment of leg ulcers and burns. The hand cream has a lower concentration than the 'medical' creams, but I found it absorbed well. To order, tel: +44 (0)1252 330850. www.manukahoney.co.uk



CRABTREE & EVELYN Gardeners' Hand Therapy (250ml pump bottle) £15.50
Although this appears the most expensive of the bunch, it actually contains a lot of lotion and lasts for ages. The thick lotion is lightly waxy and yet is absorbed extremely quickly. It has a light but not unhorticultural smell. Hand Therapy comes in a tube too, but I would plump for a pump every time. This was absolutely my favourite 'kitchen' hand lotion to apply every time I washed my hands. Stockists, tel: +44 (0)20 7361 0499. www.crabtree-evelyn.co.uk

HELEN'S FAVOURITE by the sink



QUINTESENTIALLY ENGLISH Gardener's Beeswax Hand Cream (35g tin) £7.50
My editor and I couldn't agree about this extremely powerful cream made with beeswax from Lacock beehives (a charming National Trust village in Wiltshire). I found it slow to absorb - so that the lid skidded when I tried to put it back on the tin. She rates it highly after some really hard gardening (without gloves, no doubt). Either way, I could certainly feel all that beeswax and it has a strong, seductive smell. To order, tel: +44 (0)1249 730100. www.quintessentially-english.co.uk



JANET CARTER 'Perfect Hands' Gardener's Hand Cream (100g pot) £5.50
Janet Carter's creams are a bit of legend and this one is no exception. It contains beeswax, olive and coconut oils but is actually quite a light emulsion that absorbs quickly, and has a lovely fresh and grassy smell. I rather liked this one - highly suitable for after-dinner hand pampering sessions in front of the telly. If you are thinking of presents, the only drawback is the rather mundane packaging. Stockists, tel: +44 (0)1738 630259. www.janet-carter.com



L'Occitane Organic Garden Hand Cream with Olive Oil and Tomato (75ml tube) £11.50
Tomato? Are the French having a little joke here? Why didn't they throw in the basil as well? However, it is a pleasant, light cream in an unusually nifty tube that releases the cream without the need to remove the lid. Very clever. And the tomato was redolent of the leaves rather than the fruit, so there's no danger of smelling culinary. It has posh packaging - with an outer box - so a good present, perhaps. Stockists, tel: +44 (0)20 7907 0301. www.loccitane.com



The Fragrant Gardener Intensive Hand and Nail Cream (250 ml pot) £6.95
I have used this cream in the past and have always liked it. It is absorbed extremely well, but better than that is the strong lavender fragrance, so addictively 'real' that it is such a pleasure to apply. I have become very attached to this one - a perfect last thing at night treat. Keep one by the bed and that authentic fragrance will no doubt lull you to sleep. Sweet dreams! To order, tel: +44 (0)1485 570384. www.norfolk-lavender.co.uk

HELEN'S FAVOURITE by the bed

I've always claimed, defensively, that women with nice nails who claim to be gardeners are only playing at it, and despite my assertion that gardening gloves should always, but always, be worn, I frequently find myself up to the elbows in something horrid before the thought of reaching for my own has even crossed my mind.

Consequently, I have hands of which even a mole would be ashamed. So, armed with just a smattering of the myriad creams and lotions available, I gave myself two weeks to see if unaccustomed pampering would really make a difference - and, hopefully, find something suitable as gifts for similarly challenged gardening friends. How would the ones in lovely packaging and, often, hefty price tags, measure up to my cupboard stalwarts Lotil Cream (about £2.99) and E45 moisturising hand cream (about £3.79)?



'I gave myself two weeks to see if pampering would make a real difference'

Trying to understand precisely what I was rubbing into my skin was almost impossible since I am neither an industrial chemist nor am I fluent in beauticians' hocus pocus. At its simplest, hand creams are an emulsion of various oils and waxes, glycerine and 'aqua' (water) that softens the skin and relieves that uncomfortable dried feeling you get after much scrubbing at the sink. To this base is added perfume

(which is highly subjective) and preservatives. How quickly the cream is absorbed depends on the ratio of the various ingredients in each emulsion. If you need to know more than that, you're on your own - this is, after all, a gardening magazine.

I came to the non-earth shattering conclusion that you have to apply hand cream at least every time you wash your hands. Although I was not dealing

hand creams on test

strictly with barrier creams, it also became clear that some of the more waxy creams I came across would add a protective layer to nails and cuticles before, as well as after, gardening. Over the fortnight or so during which I really tried to mend my ways, I made sure that I had a pot, jar or bottle of something lovely next to every washbasin in the house. I also found that having an easy to use pump-bottle of something not too powerfully scented near the kitchen sink was a must.

I placed a pot of pleasantly scented gloop next to the sofa into which I slump of an evening, and yet another one - with a soothing sleep inducing perfume - on my bedside table. After a couple of weeks - with a little extra scrubbing and messing around with emery boards, etc, I was stunned at how much my hands had improved - considering the unpromising, often extremely raw, material.