

Among the Willows

Help clients reduce inflammation and control excess oil with white willow extract

by Kris Campbell

There are several species of willow trees, each with their own unique extract. The type most commonly used in skin care is derived from white willow bark. The extract comes from the white willow tree (*Salix alba*), a medium-to-large perennial deciduous species. The name comes from the white tone on the underside of its leaves. This species is native to Europe and western and central Asia.

WHAT IS IN WHITE WILLOW BARK?

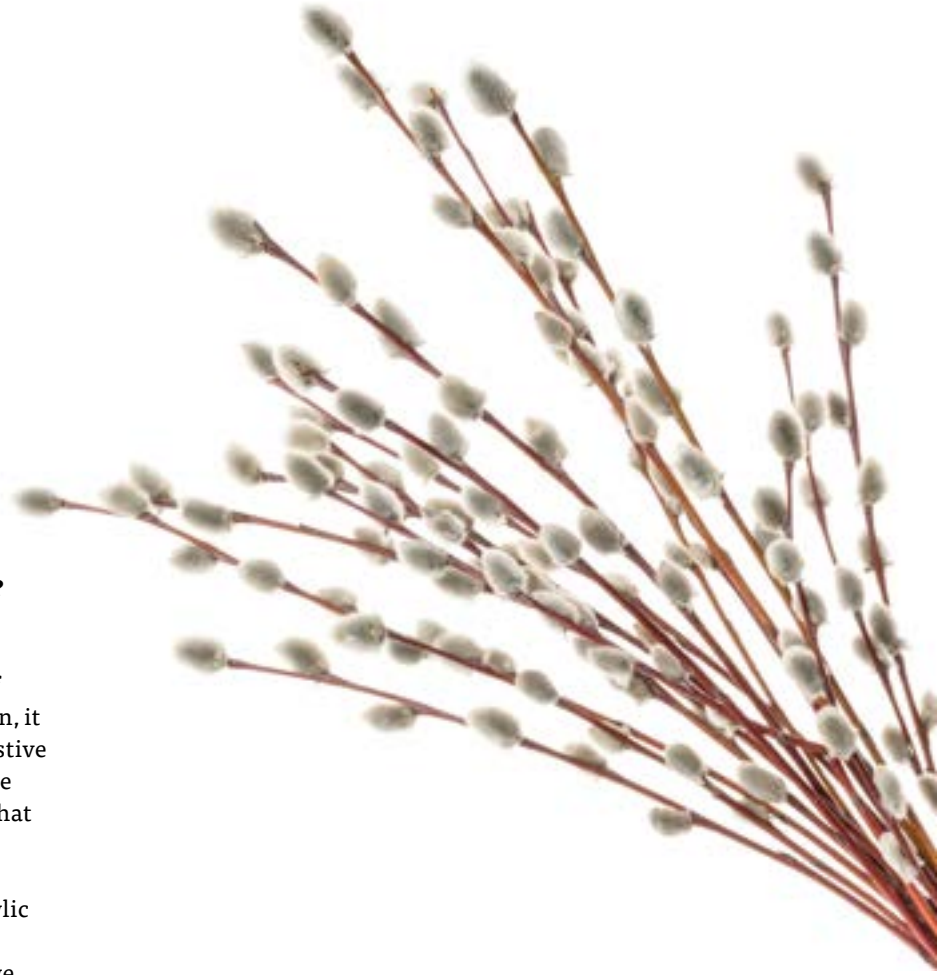
• **Tannins:** The extract of willow bark contains tannins. Found in bark and other plant-based tissue, tannins are highly astringent and are frequently found in toners and other skin care products to refine pores, making skin appear more youthful. They are also helpful in controlling excess oil found in acne-prone skin.

• **Salicin:** The name *salicin* (natural salicylic acid) comes from the willow tree genus *salix*. Salicin has wonderful anti-inflammatory properties. It's the ingredient used in aspirin to reduce body pains and swelling. Salicin has also been shown to relax wrinkles, reduce the appearance of pore size, and even out skin tone by reducing inflammation. The widely used beta hydroxy acid (BHA) salicylic acid is the metabolized derivative of salicin.

• **Polyphenols:** Polyphenols are *phytonutrients* (nutrients found in plants). They are high in antioxidant activity, which helps both body and skin fight free radical damage, which in turn helps with premature aging of the skin's DNA. Polyphenols will also aid the skin in moisture retention. Phytonutrients even help protect against photodamage caused by exposure to the sun. The anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties found in willow bark polyphenols provide relief for acne and other skin conditions, such as eczema, rosacea, and psoriasis.

• **Flavonoids:** Flavonoids are a type of polyphenol. They are also high in antioxidant activity and excellent in fighting antiaging. The flavonoids work to fight free radicals, which helps slow down the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles. Their protection of the skin's barrier is also effective against environmental damage like that from UV exposure. Flavonoids have even been shown to inhibit photodamage after UV exposure.





WHITE WILLOW BARK = SALICYLIC ACID?

There is common confusion that occurs because willow bark extract contains the anti-inflammatory salicin, which is a type of salicylate. When someone orally takes salicin, it is converted to salicylic acid during the digestive process. In a laboratory setting, salicin can be chemically oxidized to yield salicylic acid. That means willow bark is a source of salicylates (salicin), which may then be chemically converted into salicylic acid, but is not salicylic acid itself. Unfortunately, many skin care companies mislead their customers to believe that willow bark and salicylic acid are the same thing and yield the same results. Willow bark is not a true salicylic substitute. It is related to salicylic, but is not the famous BHA known for having great results on acne-prone or oily clients.

SCALP BENEFITS

The extract of white willow bark can be extremely beneficial for clients who have various scalp conditions like dandruff or oily scalp. The astringent properties of the extract may gently exfoliate the scalp. For clients with these conditions, the extract processed in a shampoo will become a gentle cleanser for the scalp and hair. Because it moisturizes the hair and scalp and balances the sebum, having willow bark in hair products will help make the scalp healthier.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

Clients who are allergic to aspirin-type products should not use white willow bark, as they may have a reaction on the skin if the product has a higher amount of willow bark. It may cause subtler visible signs versus a violent allergic reaction, but if an allergy to aspirin is indicated, it is better to err on the side of caution.

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THE BOTTOM LINE

White willow bark is a wonderful natural ingredient for skin care, especially when helping sensitive clients. As long as there are no contraindications for the client, this ingredient can help calm inflammation in the skin that can show up visually as redness and puffiness, and can help reduce the swelling of pores. Reducing inflammation and protecting the barrier function will allow you to help with many skin care concerns, including acne, as well as keeping skin healthier between more aggressive professional treatments. ☺