



BY ROBERT L. GOLDEMBERG

## nature's miracles

**A** 1991 brochure ("What is natural?") which is still being distributed by The Body Shop states: "We can't, and shouldn't, be grouped together with a myriad of other companies crying "Natural!" because, as you probably know, we're not like other companies. Our products cleanse, polish and protect the hair and skin. That's it. We don't make wild, unsubstantiated claims... but "natural" is not enough when it comes to product safety and effectiveness. In order to keep our products fresh, stable, effective and able to withstand contamination during normal use, we must use preservatives . . . additionally, some of the synthetic ingredients we use are ethical alternatives to ingredients obtained by means which are cruel to animals. For

example... musk. The Body Shop has created a synthetic version".

These are the basic premises of many marketers of "natural" products. You put in naturally-based ingredients which you believe are beneficial to the skin and hair, then add preservatives (rarely natural) and whatever synthetics are necessary to hold the product together (emulsifiers and polymers such as the Carbomers) plus fragrance and anti-irritants if required. In the end, the actual level of the "naturals" is usually rather low for various reasons which include cost, discoloration problems, poor odor and difficulty of preservation. As a result, some less-than-ethical marketers are tempted merely to buy herbal extract mixtures containing five or six ingredients, use only 0.1-0.5 percent of this mixture in their cosmetic, then happily list these five or six (or more!) "naturals" on their product's label. Legally correct, nevertheless such "window dressing" is unfortunate. Its prime purpose is not to remedy a

poor skin condition, but rather, a means of selling product to gullible men and women who believe in nature's miracles, who believe that "natural" is safer and more efficacious than synthetic. Thus, we read product labels and see **Oregon Grape Root**, **Irish Moss**, and **Licorice** (said to "stimulate cell production of interferon, the body's own anti-viral compound."). Since licorice sticks were found in King Tut's tomb, licorice must be good, right? After all, if Native American Indians (or ancient Egyptians) used the stuff, it must be good, right?

No. Of course not. Perhaps the shamans in those societies had nothing better available. We do. And yet, the appeal of the word "natural" persists in our society,

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