

Swiss apple is key to Michelle Obama's youthful looks

The secret of Michelle Obama's youthful looks may be a rare Swiss apple with an exceptionally long shelf-life.

By Alexandra Williams in Geneva
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According to the US edition of *Vogue*, the First Lady buys a £215 serum which uses an extract from the stem cells of the Uttwiler Spätlauber apple.

The variety stays fresh for up to four months after being harvested, long after other varieties have become wrinkled.

Used in creams and serums, stem cells from the fruit are said to stimulate human skin stem cells, thereby protecting skin cell regeneration and delaying the onset of wrinkles.



Michelle Obama, the First Lady of the United States of America

It is being hailed in the cosmetic world as an exciting anti-ageing breakthrough and has been snapped up by around 100 beauty firms in Europe, Asia, and the United States, including Lancôme and Chantecaille.

Vogue has dubbed it "the super apple" and asked if the tree could be "the new fountain of youth".

Despite its long shelf-life, the apple has not been considered desirable until now because of its tart taste. Consequently the number of trees has rapidly dwindled.

The variety, first recorded in the mid-18th century, comes from northern Switzerland. If the tree's bark or the skin of an unpicked fruit is punctured it heals. And once picked, an Uttwiler Spätlauber apple lasts months longer than its shrivelled cousins.

Swiss scientists at Mibelle Biochemistry, which is a subsidiary of the big Swiss retailer Migros, decided to investigate whether the miracle component could be harnessed to stop the ageing process in people.

They found the key to the apple's longevity lay chiefly in its unusually resilient stem cells.

In clinical tests the apple's stem cells appeared to be protecting human stem cells. They nourished and stimulated them and defended them against UV radiation.

They made a cream containing a two per cent Uttwiler Spätlauber extract and applied it twice daily to the "crow's feet" area under the eyes of 20 participants. Wrinkle depth was reduced by an average of 15 per cent after four weeks.

"We thought there must be something in those apples which gives them their long shelf life," said Beata Hurst, marketing and sales manager at Mibelle Biochemistry.

"We could show that the apple stem cells have a positive influence on the vitality of the skin stem cells. They made them more efficient and they can live longer."

At present there are only 20 Uttwiller Spätlauber trees in Switzerland. They belong to ProSpecieRara, a foundation aiming to preserve traditional breeds of animals and plants in Switzerland.

The organisation has managed to preserve 1,800 varieties on 8,000 trees during its 25 years in operation, through collecting samples, growing them and then distributing them to people willing to look after them.

Bela Bartha, foundation director, said: "We have undiscovered treasures in these collections."

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