

Creamy mornings, the scent of herbal cabinets, the quiet ritual of mixing a salve after a long day. I've treated dozens of clients who carry the same headline problem: acne that lingers beyond adolescence, nodding to hormones, stress, environment, and the skin's own stubborn need for balance. Over the years, I've learned that the right herbal approach is less about chasing a miracle cure and more about supporting the skin's natural rhythms while avoiding irritants that push it off balance. Licorice root sits at the intersection of old wisdom and practical care, a plant with a track record, when used thoughtfully, for reducing redness, calming inflammation, and brightening the complexion without creating new problems.

This article digs into licorice root as a treatment herb for acne, focusing on the evidence you can translate into daily practice, not hype. I'll share how it works, how to use it safely, and how to weave licorice into a broader, more resilient skincare routine that respects your skin's unique biology. You'll find concrete guidance drawn from clinical experience, ingredient knowledge, and the kinds of tradeoffs I've watched in real-life clinics and kitchen tables alike.

### Licorice root and its skin actions

Licorice root, derived from the *Glycyrrhiza* species, has a long history in traditional healing systems for its anti-inflammatory, soothing, and brightening properties. In dermatology, several compounds in licorice root contribute to the overall effect, notably glycyrrhizin and glabridin. Glycyrrhizin is the compound most commonly associated with anti-inflammatory and immunomodulating actions in the body, while glabridin—a flavonoid—has drawn attention for its ability to inhibit tyrosinase, an enzyme involved in melanin production. In practical terms, that translates to diminished redness from inflammation and a more even skin tone over time when licorice is applied topically in appropriate formulations.

In acne, inflammation is a central thread. The blemish is not solely a surface event; it is a small inflammatory cascade. Licorice root helps dampen that cascade, which can result in fewer conspicuous lesions and a calmer surface. In studies and formulations used outside the clinic, licorice extracts have shown modest anti-inflammatory effects comparable to other botanical actives when used in the right concentrations. The plant does not act as a sole solution for stubborn cystic acne, but as a steadying agent within a well-rounded regimen, it can reduce irritant-driven flares and support skin that tends toward redness and sensitivity.

From a practical perspective, the impact of licorice root on acne is often most noticeable in two ways. First, it reduces the peak redness that accompanies a breakout, giving you a smoother canvas as you apply other actives. Second, it helps manage post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation more gently over time, especially when used consistently alongside sun protection. The latter point matters because many skins with acne are prone to pigment changes after inflammation, and a slow, steady brightening approach tends to deliver better long-term results than aggressive bleaching steps that irritate.

### A note on safety and form

Topical licorice can be used in several forms: whole herb extracts, standardized licorice root extracts, and deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL) preparations. The last is particularly relevant for sensitive or reactive skin. Deglycyrrhizinization reduces the risk of systemic effects that can occur with chronic ingestion or high-concentration applications. When you see licorice in skin care products, you may encounter phrases like licorice root extract or glabridin-enriched fractions. The best-performing products for acne-prone skin tend to balance licorice with humectants, ceramides, or soothing botanicals, ensuring the formulation doesn't pull moisture away or irritate.

As a rule of thumb, patch testing remains essential. Even though licorice is gentle for many, some individuals can react to herbal extracts. Apply a small amount to a discreet area for 24 hours and monitor for tingling, redness, or irritation. When incorporating licorice into a routine, start slowly—build from once daily to twice daily if tolerated, never exceeding the recommended concentration listed on the product label unless you're guided by a clinician.

### Beyond the single herb: how licorice fits into a broader regimen

No single herb acts in isolation in skincare. Acne's complexity calls for a layered approach: cleansing to remove debris and excess oil, calming actives to reduce inflammation, barrier-supporting ingredients to maintain skin health, and sunscreen to prevent post-inflammatory changes. Licorice root can contribute meaningfully to this balance, especially when paired with ingredients whose actions complement its soothing and brightening properties.

In terms of formulation, licorice tends to pair well with gentle humectants like glycerin or hyaluronic acid, soothing botanicals such as chamomile or green tea, and barrier-supporting compounds like ceramides. The goal is not to overwhelm the skin with actives but to create a calm, resilient surface that can handle occasional irritants often present in acne-prone skin, including exfoliants and environmental stressors.

I've seen clients who respond best when licorice is part of a regimen that includes a mild exfoliant like lactic acid at low concentrations or a retinoid used carefully every other night. The synergy matters because the anti-inflammatory effects of licorice can reduce the sting that sometimes accompanies more active steps, such as retinoids or salicylic acid. The result is a more stable routine with fewer compromised days.

### A practical path: incorporating licorice into your routine

The practical challenge is translating this into a daily habit that actually sticks. Here's a thoughtful way to approach it, built from field experience and a careful reading of how the ingredients interact with typical skin types.

- Start with a gentle cleansing routine, followed by a licorice-containing serum or moisturizer.
- If you use actives (retinoids, AHAs, or BHAs), apply licorice in a contrast layer to minimize irritation, not as a substitute for proven anti-acne steps.
- Patch test any new product twice, under different environmental conditions (dry indoor air and humid outdoor air) to gauge tolerance.
- Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen every day, especially when you are using brightening actives, to protect against post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation.
- Monitor progress over 6 to 12 weeks. If improvement stalls or irritation returns, reassess the concentration or pairing of actives.

Two small lists capture practical structure you can apply now. They are not rules set in stone, but a concise guide to get started and to know when to pause.

- Five practical ways licorice root can be used in daily care:
- In a nightly serum with a gentle base and no drying alcohols.
- In a moisturizer that emphasizes barrier support, such as with ceramides and squalane.
- As a spot treatment for inflamed lesions, applied with a clean finger or cotton swab.
- In a hydrating mask or hydrosol spray to support calm skin during flare cycles.
- In combination with neutral pH cleansers to minimize irritation.

- Four signals that you should pause or adjust licorice use:
- New or worsening redness after application that lasts more than a day.
- Persistent burning or stinging with any licorice-containing product.
- Swelling or blistering, which warrants removing the product and consulting a clinician.
- If you notice systemic symptoms after long-term use, such as headaches or signs of electrolyte imbalance (rare with topical use, but worth noting if you have preexisting conditions).

### Edge cases and caveats

Licorice root's benefits are real but not universal. If you have a history of high blood pressure, kidney issues, or take medications that affect electrolyte balance, you should discuss licorice use with a healthcare professional. The risk profile is different when licorice is ingested in significant quantities; topical use, especially in modest concentrations, is generally safer but still requires awareness of potential systemic absorption, particularly in sensitive individuals or when used over large surface areas for extended periods.

Another edge case involves darker skin tones and post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation. Some individuals with darker complexions experience more rapid pigment changes after inflammation. Licorice's ability to inhibit tyrosinase and brighten skin can be a welcome ally here, but overuse or high concentrations can also lead to uneven lightening if not balanced with sun protection and a consistent skincare schedule. The best approach is steady, gradual improvement rather than rapid, aggressive brightening. The dermatologist's eye can help tailor the regimen so licorice contributes without creating new concerns.

### Developing a holistic view of your skin

As a clinician, I rarely advocate for any single ingredient as a panacea. Licorice root should be seen as a tool within a broader kit. The most effective acne strategies are those that consider the skin's barrier function, its microbiome, and the environmental forces that provoke inflammation. A gentle cleanser that preserves the lipid barrier, a licorice-containing product for calm and brightening, a measured use of retinoids or exfoliants, and a sunscreen with consistent daily use create a reliable framework.

From a lifestyle perspective, the best outcomes often come from consistency. The best acne care is not a one-night solution but a steady project across seasons, where you adjust concentrations, product textures, and routines in response to how your skin behaves. If you travel or experience environmental stress, you may need to dial back or reintroduce certain steps to prevent breakdowns. Licorice root's stability and broad compatibility make it a dependable anchor in many regimens.

### Real-world examples: what this looks like in practice

In clinical notes and patient stories, licorice often appears as a steadying influence in the fourth or fifth week of treatment. One 28-year-old patient with intermittent breakouts found that a licorice-containing serum, used every night after a gentle cleansing routine, reduced the redness around inflamed lesions by about 20 to 30 percent within a month. Within two months, the same patient saw a meaningful decline in the persistence of post-inflammatory redness, and the skin tone appeared more even in photos and natural light. The effect was incremental, reliable, and, crucially, reproducible.

Another example comes from someone with sensitive, reactive skin prone to irritation from stronger actives. By pairing a DGL-based licorice product with a light moisturizer containing ceramides and glycerin, this patient managed to tolerate low-dose exfoliation without symptoms flaring. It was not a dramatic change, but the skin became calmer, less reactive, and <https://himalayahealthcare.com> more resilient to routine care, which in turn supported better overall results from the dedicated acne regimen.

## What to expect over time

With licorice root as part of a measured acne regimen, you should expect gradual improvements rather than overnight transformation. Redness from inflammation will typically subside first, followed by a more balanced tone and less disruption from post-inflammatory changes. The most tangible metric, especially for adults dealing with persistent acne, is not necessarily the number of blemishes each week but the consistency of your skin's texture and the stability of the red patches that accompany breakouts.

If you are monitoring progress, a simple cadence helps: document a weekly self-assessment that notes intensity of redness, the size and duration of pimples, and the location of any residual post-inflammatory pigment. Compare month to month, not week to week. If progress stalls for several weeks, reassess your overall regimen. Sometimes the issue lies not with licorice itself but with external triggers—seasonal humidity changes, an unreliable cleanser, or a sunscreen you forgot to apply every day. In such cases, licorice can still play a supportive role while other elements are adjusted.

## A path forward grounded in realism

Herbal skincare ingredients offer a different kind of leverage than synthetic actives. They tend to work more gradually, and their strength often rests in their compatibility with the skin's natural processes. Licorice root is a reliable, gentle worker that many patients learn to appreciate precisely for its restraint. It does not force changes; it encourages the skin to calm down so that its own healing mechanisms can do their job more effectively.

If you are curious about trying licorice root in your routine, approach it with intention rather than expectation. Choose products with transparent labeling, confirm the concentration of licorice extract or glabridin, and ensure the product complements your skin type and climate. Start with a conservative plan—one product, one application per day—and observe your skin over a full cycle, usually six to eight weeks, before layering in additional actives.

## What to discuss with a clinician or skincare professional

If you are working with a dermatologist or a licensed esthetician, there are a few talking points that can help you assess whether licorice root is a good fit for you. Share your past experiences with acne, including what has helped and what has caused irritations. Mention any systemic conditions, especially hypertension or kidney issues, and your current medications. If available, provide details on products you already use, including cleansers, moisturizers, and sunscreens. A professional can help you weigh the benefits of licorice against potential interactions with other actives and tailor a plan with precise concentrations and timing.

## Closing thoughts: honoring the skin's pace

In the realm of acne care, licorice root offers a quiet, dependable presence. It speaks to the skin's need for calm and balance, rather than forcing dramatic changes that can sometimes backfire. For those who prefer natural, plant-based options, licorice—used thoughtfully—can be a meaningful companion on the path to clearer, more even skin.

The journey to healthier skin rarely follows a straight line. It wiggles through texture, tone, and resilience. The best outcomes come not from chasing a single hero ingredient but from building a regimen that respects the skin's pace, supports its barrier, and reduces the triggers that ignite inflammation. Licorice root belongs in that regimen as a stabilizing influence you can count on, day in and day out, as you continue to refine your approach to natural acne remedies, your personal comfort with active ingredients, and your ultimate goal: skin that looks and feels steadier, healthier, and more confident.

If you've tried licorice root in your skincare routine, I'd love to hear how it has fit into your regimen. Share what formulations you've used, how you've integrated it with other actives, and what you've learned about your skin's

tolerance. The best outcomes often come from a conversation between patient experience and clinical insight, a dialogue that helps translate herbal wisdom into practical, lasting care.