



Courtesy of Topicals

BEAUTY > MAKEUP & SKINCARE

Fade Dark Spots Quickly With These Expert-Loved Serums

Finally, a definitive list of what actually works.

BY NERISHA PENROSE PUBLISHED: NOV 3, 2025



If only there were a world where, once you've controlled your acne with no future breakouts in sight, your skin would revert to staying radiant, clear, and smooth. Unfortunately, there are these pesky visitors called dark spots that stick around long—and I mean *long*—after blemishes have subsided. We try to hide them behind layers of concealer and foundation, or even apply sunscreen formulas religiously throughout the day to minimize their appearance. While sunscreen can help lighten dark spots, this type of concern is truly reserved for formulas specifically designed to address the layers of discoloration behind each mark. Enter: dark spot serums.

“Dark spots or hyperpigmentation can be caused by various factors, including genetics, medications, inflammatory skin conditions, prolonged UV exposure, hormonal changes, and certain medical conditions,” says **Dr. Debbie Palmer**, board-certified dermatologist at Dermatology Associates of New York. Not to mention, picking and prodding at breakouts can exacerbate the inevitable scarring that accompanies acne. **Dr. Angela Lamb** notes that a different approach is necessary for treating post-inflammatory scarring compared to active breakouts. “While acne treatment focuses on clearing pores, reducing inflammation, and killing bacteria, dark spot treatment concentrates on fading the discoloration and controlling melanin production,” she adds.

Our picks for the best dark spot serums of 2025



BEST FOR DAILY USE

Caudalie Vinoparfect Dark Spot Serum

[Read more](#) ↓

BEST K-BEAUTY

Medicube Deep Vita C Serum 2.0

[Read more](#) ↓

BEST BRIGHTENING MOISTURIZER

Akar Soothe Moisturizer

[Read more](#) ↓

Effective ingredients often resemble retinol, tranexamic acid, and azelaic acid. To take it a step further, Dr. Palmer suggests coupling these at-home routines with in-office treatments, such as “chemical peels, microneedling, and laser therapy. These treatments focus on the source of the problem, the overproduction of melanin in the skin.” To get the ball rolling, we sourced 10 of the most effective dark spot treatments on the market, based on expert recommendations from dermatologists, customer feedback, and ELLE editors’ personal skin care arsenal.

BEST DEAL



Medicube Deep Vita C Serum 2.0

\$22 **\$19**
[JUMP TO REVIEW](#)

What is Xiidra?
Xiidra (lifitegrast ophthalmic solution) 5% is a prescription eye drop used to treat the signs and symptoms of dry eye disease.

Important Safety Information
Do not use Xiidra if you are allergic to any of its ingredients. Seek medical care immediately if you get any symptoms of an allergic reaction.

BEST FOR DAILY USE

Caudalie Vinoperfect Dark Spot Serum



\$82

REVOLVE **PROS** Fast-absorbing**CONS** Works best on newer scars

Here's a product internet skin care obsessives hyped, but was well worth the squeeze—literally. The Vinoperfect serum stands as one of the best dark spot-correcting formulas on the market, largely thanks to Caudalie's patented alternative to vitamin C, vine sap viniferine, which brightens and corrects tone without any irritation.

Key ingredients: Vine sap viniferine

Size: 1 fl oz

Revolve rating: 5/5 stars

An ELLE editor says: "I call this my maintenance product. As someone who has prescribed retinol to help lighten the appearance of dark spots, this serum is my favorite in-between formula to continue the correcting powers of my retinol. It has a milky, lightweight texture that absorbs quickly into the skin—a huge win for someone like me who wants to get to bed as fast as possible."—*Nerisha Penrose, beauty commerce editor*

BEST K-BEAUTY

Medicube Deep Vita C Serum 2.0



Now 13% Off

~~\$22~~ \$19

AMAZON 

PROS

✔ Brightens complexion

CONS

✘ Some users note the smell can be overbearing

K-beauty fans already love Medicube's viral Age-r Booster Pro wand, but the brand boasts a host of potent skin care formulas to bring you closer to the clearer, brighter skin of your dreams. Start here with its vitamin C serum, which boosts radiance and targets hyperpigmentation via the 14.5 percent pure vitamin C included. Even better, you get three tiny vials to keep your routine consistent.

Key ingredients: Vitamin C

Size: 0.35 fl oz/ea

Amazon rating: 4.3/5 stars

An Amazon reviewer says: "These little bottles are potent. No skin irritation, you see brightness immediately, and no stickiness—the glow is visible. Oh yeah, you will see results."

BEST BRIGHTENING MOISTURIZER

Akar Soothe Moisturizer



\$118

AKARSKIN.COM 

PROS

 Calming ingredients

CONS

 May not be best for oily skin

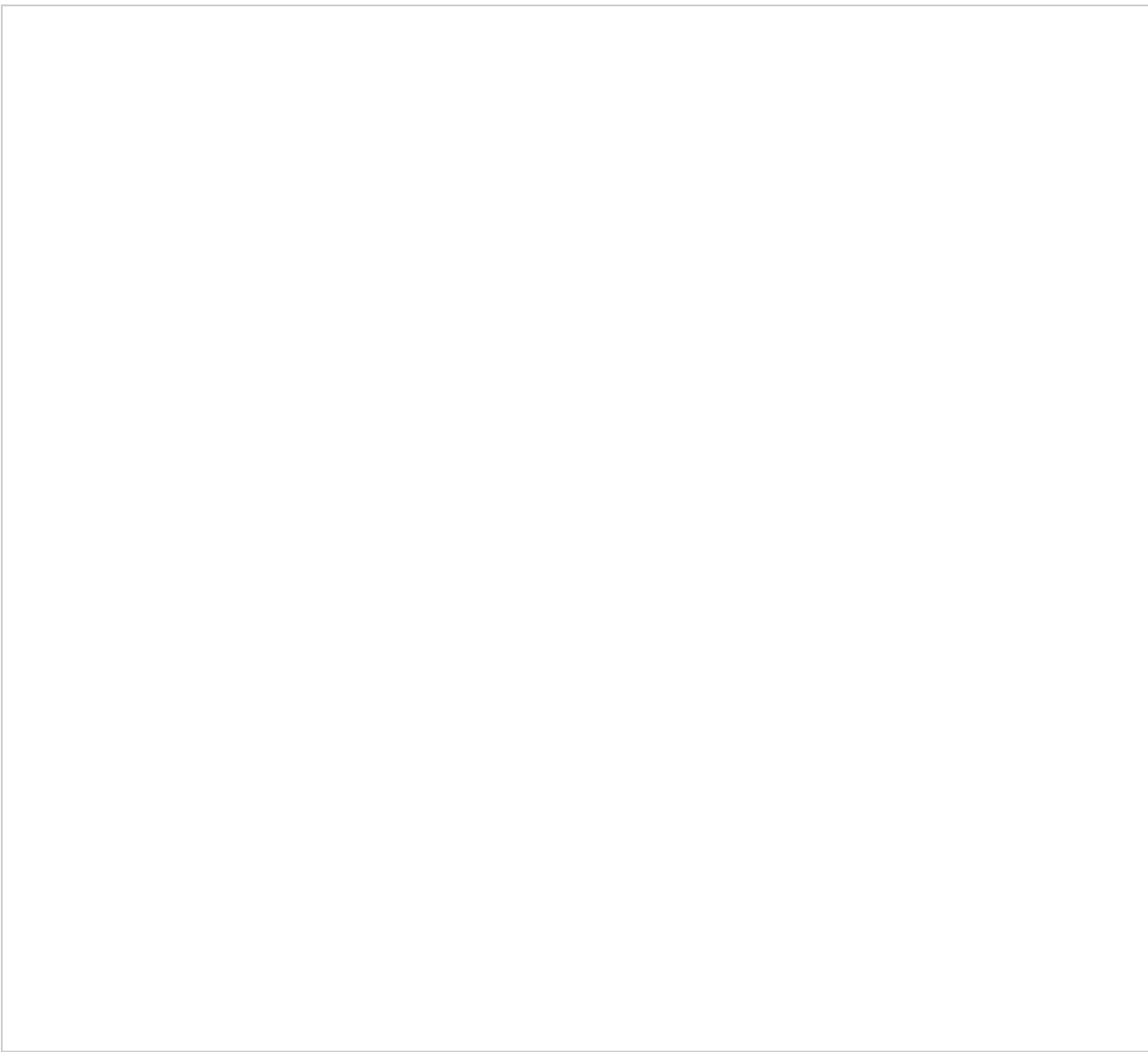
While this moisturizer contains vitamin C for brightening, its main function is what its name suggests: to soothe. Packed into this beautiful red vial is a nutrient-rich formula extracted from over 25 seed oils to plump and hydrate dull and dry skin.

Key ingredients: Vitamin C, green pea peptide, damascena flower water

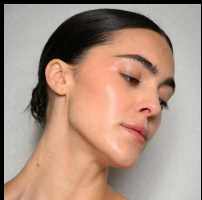
Size: 2 fl oz

Akar rating: 4.8/5 stars

Our expert says: “One of my favorite products is the AKAR Soothe Moisturizer which includes Vitamin C, which is extremely effective for pigmentation, especially sun spots or lentigos.”—***Dr. Angela Lamb***, *assistant professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Dermatology*



What to Read Next



The 10 Best Collagen Serums, According to Experts



Vitamin C Body Lotions Are Key to Radiant Skin



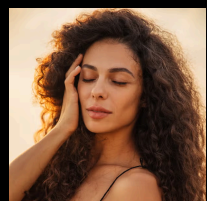
The 13 Drugstore Vitamin C Serums for Bright Skin



The Korean Serums Experts Can't Live Without



13 Reasons You Need a Leave-In Conditioner



AHA Serums Are the Gentle Exfoliant Experts Love

BEST FOR NEW BREAKOUTS

Sofie Pavitt Face Mandelic Acid Exfoliating & Clearing Serum



\$54

SEPHORA **PROS** Gently exfoliates dead skin cells**CONS** May not be best for super sensitive skin

Anyone on the acne journey knows a thing or two about Sofie Pavitt's offerings, but this one specifically deserves the spotlight. This serum provides gentle exfoliation, using eight percent mandelic acid—one of the gentler AHAs—while hyaluronic acid offers a boost in hydration.

Key ingredients: Mandelic acid, hyaluronic acid

Size: 0.95 fl oz

Sephora rating: 4.9/5 stars

An ELLE editor says: “Sofie Pavitt is known as the ‘acne whisperer’ in beauty editor circles, so it was only a matter of time before I—an acne-prone girly—checked the brand out myself. This was my introduction, an airy, non-sticky serum that helped minimize my breakouts and keep the post-inflammatory marks to a minimum. As with any skin care product, consistency is the name of the game. Over time, I noticed how much brighter my skin appeared—the only change in my routine was this.”—*Nerisha Penrose*

BEST ANTI-BLUE LIGHT SERUM

Matter of Monday Anti-Blue Light Brightening Serum



\$68

MATTEROFMONDAY.COM [↗](#)**PROS**

- ✓ Shields skin from blue light-emitting screens

CONS

- ✗ It's easy to go through one bottle quickly

Not to be a debby downer, but our phones and laptop screens could be the culprit behind our most concerning skin care woes. This serum from Matter of Monday features an ingredient called Pepha-Age, which shields the skin from the harmful effects of blue light.

Key ingredients: Pepha-Age, vitamin C, hyaluronic acid

Size: 1 fl oz

Matter of Monday rating: 5/5 stars

Our expert says: “This contains a micro-algae extract that helps defend against environmental light stressors that can worsen hyperpigmentation. In addition, it is also formulated with rice bran extract (which contains ferulic acid) and vitamin C, which are well-known actives that help fade hyperpigmentation.”—**Dr. Ryan Turner**, board-certified dermatologist at Turner Dermatology

< NIGHT CREAM

BEST FOR DISCOLORATION

BEST AZELAIC ACID SERUM

BEST OVERALL >

BEST RETINOL ALTERNATIVE

Paula's Choice Clinical Discoloration Repair Serum



\$55

AMAZON 

ALSO CONSIDER

\$41

PAULASCHOICE.COM 

\$55

SEPHORA **PROS**

- ✔ Can be used as a spot treatment or all over face

CONS

- ✘ May not be best for super sensitive skin

The ingredient list features some of hyperpigmentation's worst enemies, namely tranexamic acid and bakuchiol, the latter a gentler but effective retinol alternative. Together, with niacinamide, they break up pigment and fade any post-blemish scarring for an even, smoother complexion.

Key ingredients: Tranexamic acid, niacinamide, bakuchiol

Size: 1 oz

Amazon rating: 4.2/5 stars

Our expert says: “The Paula’s Choice Discoloration Repair Serum has tranexamic acid, niacinamide and bakuchiol that work in combination to help reduce the

appearance of hyperpigmentation while being gentle on the skin.”—*Dr. Ryan Turner*

BEST NIGHT CREAM

Replere Repair & Replenish Night Creme

**\$124****REPLERE.COM** **PROS**

- ✔ Minimizes signs of aging

CONS

- ✘ Will need more potent formulas for deeper correction

Sometimes, conditioning salves do more for stressed, blemish-prone skin than actives. This night cream takes a gentle approach to correction, powered by antioxidants that not only nourish the skin but also even out the complexion.

Key ingredients: Aloe leaf juice, ascorbic acid (vitamin C), glycerin

Size: 1.7 fl oz

Amazon rating: 3/5 stars

Our expert says: “My favorite over-the-counter product is Replere Night Creme, which has a potent mix of antioxidants, including vitamin C. Replere underwent a 12-week, double-blind, randomized, controlled clinical trial to evaluate its efficacy and tolerance in reducing the appearance of skin aging. The line was shown to improve hyperpigmentation, as well as firmness, clarity, tactile roughness, blotchy redness, fine lines and wrinkles, and overall skin brightness.”—**Dr. Debbie Palmer**, *board-certified dermatologist at Dermatology Associates of New York*

BEST FOR DISCOLORATION

SkinCeuticals Discoloration Defense



\$115

DERMSTORE

Credit: Courtesy of the brand

PROS

✔ Corrects stubborn marks

CONS

✘ Will need to re-up often

Stubborn discoloration has finally met its match in this serum, which combines heavy-hitters like tranexamic acid, kojic acid, and niacinamide to fade dark spots. With consistent use, the skin appears brighter and more even.

Key ingredients: Tranexamic acid, kojic acid, niacinamide

Size: 1 fl oz

Dermstore rating: 3.9/5 stars

An ELLE editor says: “This is one of my favorite SkinCeuticals products that was first introduced to me during a pandemic-style Zoom consultation with a derm, and has now maintained a spot in my weekly skin care rotation. The watery texture dries seamlessly and works overtime to lighten the appearance of any

discoloration. I find that even weeks-old post-blemish marks don’t stand a chance against this formula.”—*Nerisha Penrose*

BEST AZELAIC ACID SERUM

Allies of Skin Azelaic and Kojic Advanced Clarifying Serum



\$99

DERMSTORE

PROS

✔ Reduces discoloration

CONS

✘ May not be best for super sensitive skin

True to its name, this serum clarifies the skin more effectively than most serums on the market, thanks to a potent formula that combines kojic acid, azelaic acid, and bakuchiol. This serum targets concerns beyond dark spots, such as redness and uneven texture, while also reducing excess sebum production.

Key ingredients: Azelaic acid, kojic acid

Size: 1 fl oz

Dermstore rating: 4.9/5 stars

A Dermstore reviewer says: “If you’re looking for something to help with current and future breakouts, this is your jam! Although it has some pretty powerful actives, they are delivered in such a gentle way, and still manage to make the skin feel hydrated and silky.”

BEST OVERALL

Topicals Faded Brightening Serum



\$28

SEPHORA

PROS

✓ Fades scarring

CONS

✗ Packaging can be faulty

If you have stubborn, older scars left behind from breakouts, this serum is your relief. While it mimics a lightweight cream, it absorbs smoothly into the skin and doesn't pill, even when topped with a moisturizer. The star ingredients include niacinamide, tranexamic acid, and azelaic acid, all top-tier fighters in erasing dark spots.

Key ingredients: Tranexamic acid, azelaic acid, niacinamide

Size: 1 fl oz

Sephora rating: 4.7/5 stars

An ELLE editor says: "I've learned true patience after using this product. I wasn't convinced at first, as I'm always chasing instant gratification from my products. However, the results from this serum are worth waiting for. I use this religiously to keep my hormone-induced post-cystic acne scars under control. The trick is to use it as a spot treatment to really see how effective it is in lightening a particular area, as opposed to using it all over the face."—*Nerisha Penrose*

Meet the Experts

Dr. Debbie Palmer, board-certified dermatologist at Dermatology Associates of New York

Dr. Ryan Turner, board-certified dermatologist at Turner Dermatology

Dr. Angela Lamb, assistant professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Dermatology

What skin type is more susceptible to dark spots?

Truth is, all skin types are susceptible to *some* form of spotting. “Darker skin types are more prone to post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation, and lighter skin types can develop freckling from UV exposure,” explains Dr. Palmer. However, if you’re prone to acne, your skin might benefit most from a dark spot serum. “Skin types with medium and darker skin tones can be at a higher risk of hyperpigmentation because this skin type has melanocytes that are more reactive. Those with acne-prone skin can have more chances of dark spots being left behind. In addition, those with more UV exposure over time can be more at risk of dark and sun spots forming,” adds Dr. Turner.

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As a leading publisher of fashion, lifestyle, and beauty content, ELLE.com is committed to highlighting the best products in various categories by personally testing the latest and most innovative products, interviewing countless experts, and vetting customer-loved items. For this piece, beauty editor Nerisha Penrose polled skin experts to find the best serums for treating dark spots.

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