

Prevention

7 Natural Remedies For Dark Spots

By Jessica Migala SEPTEMBER 29, 2015



PHOTO BY GETTY IMAGES

To eliminate dark spots and get an even tone, the traditional fix has been topical hydroquinone. When applied correctly (i.e., for a limited time under doctor supervision), it works well. But if you can't be bothered to be that careful with your skin care, check out these seven ingredients; all are naturally derived and generating buzz. We asked derms which ones will see spots run.

Kojic Acid



"This is one of my favorite natural skin lightening agents," says [Julius Few](#), founder of the Few Institute for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. It's a fungus extract that's popular in Asia for treating pigmentation problems. "It works by slowing the conversion of melanin in your skin," explains Few. "It's very well tolerated with little to no irritation." He uses it on all skin types, and it's safe even if you're pregnant. One caution: If you're noticing new pigmentation, see a derm. If it's a rash and you treat it yourself—even with something as safe as kojic acid—the problem may worsen.

Try it: PCA Skin pHaze 13 Pigment Gel (\$49, pcaskin.com) contains a combination of kojic, azelaic, and lactic acids.

Ascorbic Acid



You know this one well—it's vitamin C. But "C is only as good as the product it's in," says [Rebecca Kazin](#), MD, of the Washington Institute of Dermatologic Laser Surgery. That's because C can be unstable as well as irritating, so it needs to be encapsulated properly. That's a hard thing to tell by looking at labels, and "while it does help, I don't think you'll be wowed by [the results]," says Kazin. She uses C as part of a discoloration-fighting regimen—not as a stand-alone.

Try it: Kazin recommends SkinCeuticals products for their high-quality vitamin C. Consider Phloretin CF (\$162, [skinceuticals.com](#)), a combo of vitamin C and ferulic acid.

Ellagic Acid

You'll find this antioxidant naturally in fruits such as berries. It's also popping up in brighteners as another means of regulating melanin production and fading discoloration. In a 2013 study (funded by L'Oreal) published in the *Journal of Drugs in Dermatology*, a product that combined ellagic acid and salicylic acid was found to be as effective as a 4% hydroquinone product. The problem? Products containing ellagic acid can be hard to find. In fact, it was an ingredient Few has never used.

Try it: SkinCeuticals Advanced Pigment Corrector (\$90, [skinceuticals.com](#)).

MORE: [12 Natural Sunburn Cures](#)

Azelaic Acid



Derived from barley and wheat, you'll often find azelaic acid in rosacea and acne products because it kills bacteria, unclogs pores, and reduces inflammation. "Many patients who come in for hyperpigmentation issues also have acne," says Few. Azelaic helps get rid of acne and lighten spots left behind by breakouts. He combines kojic and azelaic acid for a powerful one-two punch against pigmentation.

Try it: Dermalogica Breakout Control (\$46, [dermalogica.com](#)) packs a derivative of azelaic acid to reduce oil and pimple flare-ups.

Arbutin

Known as bearberry extract, arbutin is "closer to hydroquinone than the others," says Kazin. Chemically, it acts similar to hydroquinone to brighten skin. That said, it's not as effective. For that reason, if you want to use arbutin, you'll have to look for a product that combines it with other skin-brightening ingredients. Think of it as stacking the deck in your favor.

Try it: Skin Inc. Pure Revival Peel (\$55, [sephora.com](#)).

MORE: [10 Amazing Beauty Tricks With Coconut Oil](#)

Niacinamide

It may not fade dark spots, but niacinamide—a form of vitamin B3—can help correct uneven skin tone. That's because its anti-inflammatory action relieves redness, explains Kazin. She'd use it to treat mild inflammation. However, if redness is significant, see your dermatologist for a prescription-strength product first, then use niacinamide for maintenance.

Try it: Peter Thomas Roth De-Spot Skin Brightening Corrector (\$56, [lovelyskin.com](https://www.lovelyskin.com)).

Mulberry Extract



It's not the strongest or most effective of the bunch, says Few, but it works similarly to the others in that it interferes with the production of melanin. The thing is, it works very slowly. "There are other ingredients that are so effective, and that's why you don't hear much about mulberry," he says.

Try it: Look for it as part of a team of brighteners, like in DERMAdoctor Photodynamic Therapy Age Spot Eraser & Skin Brightener (\$60, [sephora.com](https://www.sephora.com)).