

## The Best BB Cream

Date: June 27, 2016

URL: <http://www.reviews.com/bb-cream/>

### **Buildable, blendable, and not too good to be true**

#### **The 30-Second Review**

BB cream is subjective — what one devotee swears by, the next one will hate. But we wanted our top picks to work for most people, so we sifted through 106 options to find which ones skip pore-clogging ingredients, slip on smoothly, and build coverage beautifully. Your mission: seeing if our top picks have your shade. Turns out, most beauty companies still haven't figured out they need more than a couple skin tones.

Typically marketed as an all-in-one moisturizer, primer, makeup, sunscreen, and more, BB creams make big promises. Yet, even the most avid fans of the stuff aren't quite sure how to define it. Is it makeup? Is it skin care? Something else entirely? Even the name is confusing — BB can stand for beauty balm, blemish balm, and blemish base, all three of which reveal it doesn't really matter.

The short answer: It's makeup. Despite their claims as wunderkind multitaskers able to do it all, we found the best way to think of BB cream is as a tinted moisturizer, with benefits. Expect lighter coverage than a traditional foundation, along with good-for-your-skin extras like SPF and, in many cases, nourishing active ingredients like vitamins and antioxidants too. But even the best BB cream, like our top picks, Dior's Diorskin Nude and Maybelline's Dream Fresh, won't replace your sunscreen or allow you

to ditch your moisturizer or give up washing your face. More on that later.

Though BB cream seemed to appear on US shelves out of nowhere five years ago, it's been around since the '60s. The product is widely attributed to Dr. Christine Schrammek, a dermatologist in Germany who wanted to offer an all-in-one product that her patients could use after laser treatments and surgery. BB cream quickly caught on in South Korea and expanded into other Asian markets. Now, almost every major makeup brand offers one or more — we're talking a full beauty aisle takeover.

## **How We Found the Best BB Cream**

For every BB cream on the market, there are at least a handful of passionate devotees willing to tell you why their favorite is far and away better than anything else out there. And, of course, makeup is a pretty subjective category; because no two skin tones or textures are quite the same, what works for one person's complexion might be the worst for someone else. But, whether you prefer full coverage to sheer or opt for a matte finish versus glossy, there are a few qualities that we can all agree on. So, that's where we started to narrow down our list of 106 BB creams before getting our hands (and beauty blenders) on the finalists.

## **We axed controversial ingredients.**

There's some stuff that just doesn't belong on your face. After talking with dermatologists and looking through research from organizations like the Environmental Working Group, we're confident there's no benefit in slathering these controversial ingredients on your face:

- Mineral oils, aka pore cloggers
- Oxybenzone and/or octinoxate, chemical sunscreens that are known skin irritants and might also be hormone disruptors. Of course, every doctor and dermatologists agree that any sunscreen is definitely better than no sunscreen. However, studies (like this one) have shown that

some chemical sunscreens, especially oxybenzone, can be allergenic and cause inflammation and irritation. Physical sunscreen like zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, on the other hand, starts working to block the sun's harmful rays faster than chemical sunscreen and tends to last longer because it doesn't decompose with sun exposure. While we let less irritating chemical sunscreens like homosalate through, all our top picks include physical sun blockers only.

- Retinol, retinyl palmitate, retinyl retinoate and/or retinyl acetate, all vitamin A-derived retinoids and popular exfoliators that slow collagen breakdown and fight both acne and wrinkles. Amazing? Yes. The problem: They're extremely photosensitizing, meaning that they can increase your risk of skin cancer when exposed to sunlight — so they shouldn't be in BB creams that you'll be wearing during the day.

“Retinoids or any products containing retinol should only be used at night, because they will increase sensitivity to the sun. I would never recommend using a retinoid during the daytime.”

Lauren Abramowitz  
PA-C, PLLC, Founder of Park Avenue Skin Solutions

### **We required at least three shades.**

Unlike foundations, BB creams don't have to be a perfect match with your skin tone. The whole point is that they are sheer, blendable, and buildable. And, they're designed to enhance your natural skin instead of cover it. As long as you're in the right ballpark — particularly if the undertones match your skin's shade — it'll look great, even if it's a bit lighter or darker than your skin. However, there's no way just one or two shades could serve all skin tones. Even three or four shades feels imperfect, but the unfortunate truth is that not

many brands offer more. In fact, of the BB creams that made it through our first cut, only eight have five or more shades and only two reach or exceed 10. “Although BB cream is a forgiving product — meaning women who are close in skin tone can wear the same one — brands still need to expand the shade range,” says makeup artist Ricky Wilson. “I don’t understand brands that have 36 shades of liquid foundation and only four BB creams.” In his opinion (and ours!), the minimum number of shades should be six to eight, with at least three or four cool undertones and three or four warm ones.

### **We looked for the right shades.**

After taking out products with questionable ingredients and too few shades, we were down to just 21 BB creams to test out.

The first step in trying those final contenders was to attempt to find the right shade match from each brand — and even though there are typically only a few shades to choose from, this was no easy task. Unlike foundation, BB creams don’t have handy online shade-matching programs or other tools to help you figure out even what ballpark your shade might be in, so you’re pretty much on your own to dig through product reviews and (often inaccurate) color swatches if you’re planning to order online.

Our tester spent a couple of hours sitting on the floor at Sephora swatching BB creams across her hands and cheeks in an effort to get a sense of her ideal shade. After going through about half a bottle of makeup remover, she determined her shade to be somewhere on the light to light/medium spectrum with most brands. She purchased the BB creams she could find in-store and then, armed with a (vague) sense of the right shade, she ordered the rest online.

No surprise, these were all over the board: What Maybelline called light/medium was the perfect match (or close to it) for our tester, but Benefit’s light/medium was far too dark and much too pink) for her skin. We didn’t out-and-out drop any brands based on imperfect matches, but we definitely paid attention to how hard it was to find one.

## **Then swatched them all.**

We looked for a few things: how each BB cream felt; how it dried; how it smelled; and whether it would be streaky, cakey, shiny, or otherwise unappealing.

We eliminated the worst offenders right off the bat. The Nvey Eco BB Cream, for example, dried in wide streaks that made our tester's skin look like a painter's work-in-progress and the Circa Beauty Color Balance BB Cream came out in a color that we've maybe never seen in human skin (it was a sort of reddish hue with oddly cool, greenish undertones). On top of that, it dried in cakey clumps. Goodbye.

We also parted ways with the Cover FX BB Gel Mattifying Anti-Blemish Treatment; it literally left clumps of pigment sitting on the skin. Blendable and buildable, no way.

## **And tried wearing the rest.**

With those first products out of the picture, our tester got her head (face?) in the game. She spread a dime-size amount onto her skin with her fingers, quickly blending it with a reusable beauty blender sponge. Her aim was to apply a first layer of light, sheer coverage and then build up the coverage in problem areas, like her chin or around her nose, while still looking natural. She wore the BB creams morning, noon, and night, through rain storms and a few extremely hot, sweaty days. One time, in an effort to break a tie, she even wore four BB creams at the same time, patched across different sections of her face. (As it turns out, this is not a particularly productive tactic, since comparing the left side of your forehead to the right side of your chin is tougher than we first thought it'd be, but hey!)

On a hot day, the Maybelline Dream Pure BB 8-in-1 Beauty Balm Skin Clearing Perfector (not to be confused with our top pick, Dream Fresh) started to make our tester's face uncomfortably itchy, perhaps due to the salicylic acid in the formulation). The Burt's Bees BB Cream with Noni Extract went on nicely, but started to feel a little sticky and claustrophobic after a few hours of wear. It also rubbed off on her shirt during a quick-change. The Nyx Cosmetics BB Cream had a similar stickiness that our tester wasn't crazy

about after an hour or two and the Benefit Bigger than BB Big Easy Liquid to Powder cream, while offering a nice matte look, was too thick, pigmented, and heavy on the skin compared to the other BBs.

## Our Picks for the Best BB Cream

### Best Overall

#### Dior Diorskin Nude BB Creme

This BB cream has a cult following among magazine editors and makeup artists and for good reason. It's got more pigment than the average BB, so it'll cover up and even out more imperfections, but it still goes on relatively sheer, allowing natural skin to show through. If you're looking for lightweight, medium coverage from your makeup, the Diorskin will be up your alley. But, you could also pile it on for fuller coverage. No makeup-face look with this BB either way.

It dries within 10 seconds, which means you've got to work fast, and then it stays put. The finish is, as advertised, just the slightest bit dewy (without ever feeling sticky). We'll call it a "natural glow."

*"I love the Dior BB Creme because it goes on smooth and has tons of moisture."*

Ricky Wilson  
Makeup Artist

There are a few key ingredients in the moisture-focused formulation that are great for dry skin, including antioxidants and anti-inflammatories like

mallow extract and linseed extract. It's also got hydrolyzed flower water with extracts from plants like hibiscus, which, as a natural source of alpha-hydroxy acids, gently and naturally exfoliates the skin and helps to prevent breakouts. While none of these are going to replace your skincare regimen, it certainly doesn't hurt to have them in your makeup.

The downside to Diorskin is that it only comes in four shades, all of which are on the light side. The range starts with a pale, peachy "light" and also includes a sand-hued "fair," a golden tan "medium," and a similarly medium shade just called "025" with pink undertones. Unfortunately, this means that if you have darker skin, you'll have a hard time finding a match. It's also worth noting that this BB cream only has an SPF of 10, so you should definitely add that supplementary layer of sunscreen. And if you're highly sensitive to scent, be sure to give it a whiff before buying — there's a lightparfum included in the ingredients.

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## **Best Drugstore BB Cream**

[Maybelline Dream Fresh BB 8-in-1 Beauty Balm Skin Protector](#)

The big buzzword with BB creams is “buildable” and the Maybelline Dream Fresh BB is just that. It goes on sheer and feels lightweight, but can easily be built up to a fuller coverage. (That said, if you’re looking to cover up blemishes or get a fuller coverage, skip this one. You can layer it on, but only to a point. While it is buildable, it still doesn’t have the amount of pigment found in heavier BBs, or the amount you’d find in a concealer or traditional foundation. An especially pesky blemish will need extra help in the cover-up department.)

A lot of thick makeup products can feel heavy — sticky or uncomfortably “noticeable” on the skin — but even several layers of the Maybelline feel like nothing. And it’s durable too. Other BBs started to inexplicably dissipate or rub off, but Maybelline’s Dream Fresh lasted without reapplication on a 12-plus-hour day.

Dream Fresh goes on smooth and quickly dries down to be mostly matte, with just the tiniest hint of sheen, which looks and feels pretty natural. The oil-free and fragrance-free formulation means it’s non-irritating (though in truth it has the tiniest bit of makeup-y scent). It also offers SPF 30 sun protection from a titanium dioxide physical sunscreen, and while you’ll likely never slather on enough for dermatologist-approved sun safety, it’s a good bonus to your daily SPF application. Plus, it has antioxidant-rich pomegranate extract to help prevent future skin damage and aloe leaf extract to soothe and moisturize. The product comes in five shades, from a very pale “light” to a much darker shade called “deep” — all with golden or neutral undertones, as opposed to more pink hues. And while five shades isn’t the widest selection, the Dream Fresh lineup at least encompasses a wider variety of skin tones than other brands that cater only to middle-of-the-range skin colors.

## **Other BB Creams to Consider**

### **Biggest Shade Range**

[bareMinerals Complexion Rescue Tinted Hydrating Gel Cream](#)



With 16 options, this BB cream is untouchable when it comes to shade range. (The next closest shade count was 10 from Cover FX.) Plus, bareMinerals actually tries to make finding a shade match less a guessing game by providing incredibly helpful descriptors for which skin color and undertone each shade is best suited for. Options range from Opal 01, described as for “the fairest porcelain skin with cool undertones” to Sienna 10 “for deep skin with neutral tones.” These descriptors helped our tester to find her ideal color, Birch 1.5, for “fair to light skin and neutral tones.” What’s extra great about this is that bareMinerals offers options for neutral undertones, unlike other brands that have only golden or pink hues (bareMinerals has those, too).

The bareMinerals BB didn’t take our overall prize because it’s an ultra-sheer formulation — there’s very little pigment in the product. The upside is that the gel cream formula feels light, cooling, and moisture-packed on the skin; the downside is that it really doesn’t offer a lot of coverage. Unlike the Maybelline or Dior, our tester had trouble building this BB cream up to fuller coverage even with layered applications, and she found that it could dry slightly streaky. Try using a sponge to help with this.

## **Best Texture**

### [AmorePacific Color Control Cushion Compact Broad Spectrum SPF 50+](#)

The award for unique applicator definitely goes to this AmorePacific BB cream. The product comes in a cushion compact with a beauty blender sponge for application — no sticky fingers here. This method unquestionably created the most natural look on our tester’s face. There were never streaks or patches and the product never dried down in spots before it could be blended. And while the \$60 price tag may be off-putting, the product actually comes with a second BB cream-filled cushion for when your first runs dry, meaning you’re getting two in one.

AmorePacific does have a strong perfumed scent. The fragrance starts to dissipate once the product hits the skin, but it’s far from ideal for the

sensitive-nosed and -skinned. (If that's you, consider the 3Lab Perfect BB SPF 40, which comes in a tube with a roller-sponge that's similar to the AmorePacific sponge in its even application.

The 3Lab was actually one of our tester's top picks (she loved the light, barely there feeling on her skin, the medium coverage level of pigment, and the fact that shade #02 was a perfect match for her skin tone), but with only three very light shades and a \$100 price tag, it was too limiting to win an overall best.

## Best Fuller Coverage

### Clarins BB Skin Perfecting Cream

Sure, BB cream isn't foundation. It's not designed to cover up every single imperfection and create porcelain doll skin. However, if you're looking for a BB cream that'll come as close as possible to standing in for your foundation, try the Clarins Skin Perfecting Cream. It comes in four fairly varied shades — from a porcelain 00 Fair to a fairly deep 03 Warm — and has more pigment than any of the other BB creams we chose. How do we know? The Clarins BB Cream nearly covered up a mole on our tester's face, which the other BB creams left unmasked. Even with all that pigment, the Clarins still dries light and doesn't feel thick or sticky. Most of the Clarins shades fall on the warmer side of the spectrum, so keep that in mind if you have very cool undertones.

## Did You Know?

### **BB creams are makeup, so you still have to wash them off at night.**

You'll find plenty of BB creams with good-for-you goodies like vitamin C, hyaluronic acid, and delicious antioxidant cocktails. However, according to pretty much every expert we spoke to, BB creams are first and foremost makeup and, as such, they need to be removed at the end of every day.

"Just like a foundation or tinted moisturizer, BB creams can clog the pores, resulting in breakouts," says dermatology practitioner Lauren Abramowitz.

"Removing them at the end of the day is a must!" While we cut any BB

creams with specifically pore-clogging ingredients, leaving just the pigmented makeup on your skin overnight can block your pores, trapping oil and bacteria inside and leading to breakouts and irritation. Bummer.

### **And even though they have SPF, you'll probably still need to apply sunscreen.**

If you've ever talked to a dermatologist, you probably know that the number one rule of skincare (and of life!) is: "Wear sunscreen!" According to the American Association of Dermatologists, that sunscreen should be SPF 30. Anything less than that cannot be guaranteed to protect your skin from damage.

Unfortunately, a lot of the BB creams on the market offer lower protection like SPF 10, 20, or even 28 (because those extra two SPF points were really beyond reach). We're not going to tell you not to wear a BB cream with low SPF, but given the very small amount of BB cream you'll use to get the pigmentation you're after, experts recommend adding an additional layer of sun protection under your BB cream each day to ensure your skin isn't damaged.

The common recommendation from dermatologists (like in this article published by the Skin Cancer Foundation) is that you need to apply at least a nickel-sized dollop of sunscreen to your face every day for it to be safe from harm. You'd have to apply a whole lot of BB cream to equal one nickel-sized dollop of straight-up sunscreen.

### **Don't give up your moisturizer either.**

Again, the primary goal of BB creams is to cover up blemishes and even out skin tone. So, while BB creams do boast some moisturizing ingredients like hyaluronic acid and aloe vera, they're not a replacement for a good old singularly focused oil, serum or cream. "BB creams are not as effective at moisturizing as a plain old moisturizer," says dermatologist Dr. Debbie Palmer. "This is because they aren't formulated with the same concentrated percentage of moisturizing ingredients as your normal day or night moisturizer." Multitasking isn't as effective as we all wish it were, though we still swear we did a better job on our homework when the TV was on. For best results, treat your BB cream like a light tint, applying it after you've

cleansed, toned, moisturized, applied sunscreen, and done whatever else you need to do. Supplement your routine; don't replace it.

## **A BB cream isn't a CC cream isn't a DD cream...**

There are so many different alphabet creams and tinted moisturizers out there. Don't worry; we've got you. Here they are from simplest to most intense:

- **Tinted Moisturizer:** This is the simplest of all the various makeup-slash-skincare products. It's just a moisturizer with some pigment in it. The color is usually pretty sheer. Lately, tinted moisturizers have been creeping into BB cream territory, adding all kinds of other ingredients including SPF too, so they're more and more interchangeable.
- **BB Cream:** The idea behind BB cream is that it's an all-in-one moisturizer, SPF, primer, and foundation, with skincare benefits. And though realistically it doesn't replace your SPF or skincare steps, it's this multi-faceted formulation that sets it apart marketing-wise from straight-up tinted moisturizers. It's much lighter than foundation and can easily replace that thicker makeup for everyday use because it's meant to work with your natural skin, instead of covering it up completely.
- **CC Cream:** The CC stands for "complexion corrector" and these products typically focus on targeted color correction. The main difference, at least in theory, is that they include a skin-brightening primer in them (whereas BB creams typically have a normal, non-brightening primer). They're particularly helpful for acne-scarring, pigmentation problems, or constant redness.
- **DD Cream:** In the seemingly endless exploration of alphabet creams, DD stands for "dynamic do-all" cream (really). It ostensibly combines the skincare benefits of BB creams and the color-correcting abilities of CC cream for an all-in-one super cream. These also typically have targeted anti-aging ingredients in them.
- **Foundation:** And then, of course, there is still foundation. Many people

prefer it for the wide range of shades most brands offer and the fuller coverage that can be achieved. Makeup artists told us that they often use BB cream or tinted moisturizer as a first layer (aka a primer) on the skin, adding foundation on top for extra coverage.

## Take Action

**Know your undertones.** Are you light with cool undertones? Dark with neutral undertones? Take online quizzes; read up; and spend a good long time looking in the mirror. The general consensus is that if you tan more often than you burn, you most likely have warm, or golden, undertones and if you burn more than you tan, you are likely to have less melanin in your skin and therefore have cool undertones. Another trick people use is to look at the veins on their wrists. If they appear blue or purple, you're probably on the cool side of the spectrum; if they're greenish, you're more warm-toned. If you have neutral undertones, you'll have a harder time discerning. Note: Our tester found that her veins looked blue, but she has neutral to warm undertones, so it's not an exact science! These tricks can't guarantee a perfect match, but they'll get you closer.

**Test it on your own skin.** We spent hours trying to match skin color to online swatches and swipes and to make intelligent guesses at the shade based on other brands that were a good match. Some of this worked, but some of it definitely did not. To get a good match, you're going to have to test each brand on your own skin. Pro tip: Be sure to go outside into some natural light before making your final decision. Some bad purchases were made based on matches found under misleading Sephora lights.

**Buy a few and try them out.** Sometimes a quick test isn't enough to really know if you love a product. Luckily, many beauty supply stores including Sephora and Rite Aid have very liberal beauty product return policies. Save your receipts and take back anything that just isn't working for you.

