

18 Best Brightening Vitamin C Serums for Glow, Radiant Skin

Dermatologist-recommended superstars for every skin type.

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COURTESY PHOTO

We updated this article in February 2023 to add more information about each featured product and a new pick, based on extensive testing done by the [Good Housekeeping Institute](#).

As far as buzzy [skincare ingredients](#) go, [vitamin C](#) is one of the most talked about — and for good reason. "Packed with [antioxidants](#), vitamin C has shown to improve [dull skin](#) texture and tone, fight free radical damage, reduce signs of aging, [dark spots](#) and [hyperpigmentation](#), hydrate, increase [collagen](#) production, brighten and provide anti-inflammatory effects," says Geeta Yadav, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist and founder of [Skin Science Dermatology](#).

"Also known as ascorbic acid and L-ascorbic acid, vitamin C provides antioxidant protection, as it donates electrons to neutralize the free radicals found on skin from environmental stressors like solar radiation and pollution," says Good Housekeeping Institute Beauty, Health & Sustainability Lab chemist [Danusia Wnek](#). Additionally, vitamin C blocks the enzyme responsible for melanin (or pigmentation) production, which means it can help [brighten skin](#). Dr. Yadav explains that because vitamin C is a water-soluble nutrient, it can be used topically in many different forms, including [face serums](#).

The Good Housekeeping Institute regularly tests [skincare products](#) to find the best ones on the market. When we review vitamin C serums, we look for technology to preserve the vitamin C, unique packaging to protect against light degradation and ingredients with synergistic benefits to improve efficacy. The below picks include GH Beauty Lab-approved products, [Good Housekeeping Seal](#) holders and top-rated affordable items from trusted brands, plus favorites from consumers and dermatologist recommendations.

Our top picks:

1



BEST OVERALL VITAMIN C SERUM
Olay Vitamin C + Peptide 24 Serum

\$39 AT ULTA BEAUTY

[Read more](#)

2



BEST VALUE VITAMIN C SERUM
RoC Multi Correxion Revive + Glow Daily Serum

\$25 AT AMAZON

[Read more](#)

3



BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR HYPERPIGMENTATION
L'Oréal Paris Revitalift Vitamin C Serum

\$19 AT AMAZON

[Read more](#)

4



BEST DERMATOLOGIST-RECOMMENDED VITAMIN C SERUM
SkinCeuticals C E Ferulic Serum

\$169 AT SKINCEUTICALS

[Read more](#)

5



BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR OVER 50
Obagi Medical Professional-C 20% Vitamin C Serum

\$137 AT DERMSTORE

[Read more](#)

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Here, read all about the best vitamin C serums you can buy for every skin type and need, plus how to choose a good formula for you.

1

BEST OVERALL VITAMIN C SERUM

Olay Vitamin C + Peptide 24 Serum



\$39 AT ULTA BEAUTY

CREDIT: OLAY

PROS

- ⊕ Has powerful active ingredients
- ⊕ Measurably brightens skin and improves discoloration

CONS

- ⊗ Could cause breakouts

Packed with powerhouse ingredients like vitamin C, [peptides](#), niacinamide and lactic acid, GH Seal star Olay's antioxidant serum helps you get your glow on. GH Beauty Lab data evaluation confirmed that **the formula significantly improves skin brightness and dark spots starting at two weeks** of twice daily use, per a study on 120 women. This may not be ideal for those with acne-prone skin, as some users did report breakouts after application.

2

BEST VALUE VITAMIN C SERUM

RoC Multi Correxion Revive + Glow Daily Serum



NOW 24% OFF

\$25 AT AMAZON

CREDIT: ROC

PROS

- ⊕ Helps promote a more even skin tone
- ⊕ Softens skin
- ⊕ Great value

CONS

- ⊗ High levels of active ingredient could cause irritation

A [GH Beauty Award winner](#) and Seal star, RoC's drugstore value serum is rich with antioxidants and vitamins. It features a **unique blend of vitamin C, castor oil and glycerin**, all of which help brighten and moisturize the skin. According to GH Beauty Lab evaluations, 94% of users found a more even skin tone with daily use. "I am almost done with my first bottle of this vitamin C serum and my skin tone looks clear," shares one Amazon reviewer. "I love this serum!" A heads up if you have sensitive skin: the high level of actives could cause irritation.

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3

BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR HYPERPIGMENTATION
L’Oréal Paris Revitalift Vitamin C Serum



\$19 AT AMAZON

CREDIT: L'OREAL PARIS

PROS

- ⊕ Tip applicator is good for spot-treating marks
- ⊕ Absorbs quickly; doesn't leave residue
- ⊕ Brightens skin and smooths fine lines

CONS

- ⊗ Feels oily when applying

Formulated for optimal skin absorption, the airtight packaging on this standout L’Oréal Paris product helps ensure that the vitamin C inside stays stable and therefore effective. GH Beauty Lab experts think **it's especially great for targeting [hyperpigmentation](#)** (a.k.a. [dark spots](#)) since you can use the precise, pointed applicator to spot treat problem areas. Reviewers rave that "skin looks brighter" and "smoother" after using this serum. However, a few also noted that it felt oily or greasy when applying.

BEST DERMATOLOGIST-RECOMMENDED VITAMIN C SERUM
SkinCeuticals C E Ferulic Serum



\$169 AT SKINCEUTICALS

CREDIT: SKINCEUTICALS

PROS	CONS
<div><div>⊕</div>Non-irritating</div> <div><div>⊕</div>High concentration of vitamin C</div> <div><div>⊕</div>Expert go-to</div>	<div><div>⊗</div>Pricey</div>

GH Beauty Lab Senior Chemist [Sabina Wizemann](#) loves this splurge-worthy SkinCeuticals serum, a dermatologist gold standard, for its **gentle yet effective performance**. “Even with a high concentration of 15% of L-Ascorbic acid — an outstanding and proven form of vitamin C — this serum doesn’t irritate my skin like other products I’ve tried,” she says. "It firms and brightens skin, and leaves it supple and glowy," thanks to the conditioning and anti-inflammatory properties of added vitamin E. This is also Dr. Yadav's top pick. "It contains vitamin E and ferulic acid, and this combination has been shown to complement [sunscreens](#) and reduce the effects of environmental stressors on the skin," she says.

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5

BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR OVER 50
Obagi Medical Professional-C 20% Vitamin C Serum



\$137 AT DERMSTORE

CREDIT: OBAGI

PROS

- ⊕ Non-drying formula
- ⊕ Helps reduce signs of aging

CONS

- ⊗ Pricey

A Dermstore best seller, this pricey pick from Obagi Medical contains one of the higher concentrates of vitamin C at 20%. Key ingredient hyaluronic acid helps bind moisture to the skin, and online reviewers said they liked that the formula wasn't drying.

6

BEST GENTLE VITAMIN C SERUM
Bliss Bright Idea Vitamin C & Tri-Peptide Collagen Serum



\$25 AT AMAZON

CREDIT: BLISS

PROS

- ⊕ Good for sensitive skin
- ⊕ Helps with collagen production

CONS

- ⊗ May feel tacky on skin

Perfect for easily aggravated skin, this serum from Bliss is formulated with a newer form of vitamin C called 3-O ethyl ascorbic acid, which is **thought to be less irritating without sacrificing efficacy**. The formula is collagen-protecting and brightening to fade dark spots, firm skin and improve texture. The brand claims the formula is ultra-stable, so it can live right in your medicine cabinet or vanity. "I love its fresh — not cloying! — citrus scent," says GH Institute Deputy Editor [Jessica Teich](#). While most reviewers love the texture, a few noted that it left skin sticky.

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BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR BEGINNERS
Yes To Grapefruit Daily Brightening Serum



\$15 AT AMAZON

CREDIT: YES TO

PROS

- ⊕ Gentle on skin
- ⊕ Brightening

CONS

- ⊗ Not as hydrating as other serums

This Yes To serum is dermatologist-recommended for those who are new to vitamin C treatments. "For something a little more accessible, and **a great entry into vitamin C**, I love this treatment," says Dr. Yadav. "It's widely available, gentle on the skin and contains grapefruit, which adds another citrus ingredient into the mix!" You can use it directly on your skin or mix a few drops into your favorite [moisturizer](#). A few reviewers noted they had to use a lot of product to nourish their skin, though, so it may not be best for very [dry skin](#).

8

BEST RESTORATIVE VITAMIN C SERUM

CeraVe Skin Renewing Vitamin C Serum



\$26 AT ULTA BEAUTY

CREDIT: CERAVE

PROS

- ⊕ Affordable
- ⊕ Ceramides create a stronger skin barrier

CONS

- ⊗ Oxidizes/turns orange quickly

If you're looking to avoid irritation, this serum holds a relatively lower level of vitamin C at 10%, and it **contains ceramides that help protect and maintain the skin barrier**. Hyaluronic acid is another key ingredient in the formula that helps draw moisture into skin and hydrate. One reviewer shares that it "feels like a very light gel moisturizer" and "if you wear makeup, this is an excellent primer, too." Other users note that it does oxidize quickly, making the formula turn orange.

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BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR ACNE SCARS
Clinique Fresh Pressed 7-Day System



\$32 AT DILLARD'S

CREDIT: CLINIQUE

PROS

- ⊕ Innovative packaging keeps actives fresh
- ⊕ Brightens overall skin tone

CONS

- ⊗ If you use too much, skin may become red and/or dry

To keep the vitamin C potent and fresh, this Clinique product keeps it isolated in an airtight dispenser. To use, press the button to release the vitamin C powder into an emulsion serum, ensuring optimal efficiency and a strong, potent product to perfect your skin. Use the complementary cleansing powder — just mix with water — in the single use packets shown to help boost the serum's efficacy. **Reviewers say they saw acne scarring go away within a week** — but a couple note that overuse can cause mild redness or dryness.

10

BEST DRUGSTORE VITAMIN C SERUM

Olay Luminous Miracle Boost Concentrate



\$43 AT AMAZON

CREDIT: OLAY

PROS

- ⊕ Reduces dark spots and illuminates
- ⊕ Lightweight
- ⊕ Softens skin

CONS

- ⊗ Has a light scent that some don't like

This GH Beauty Award-winning serum is like radiance bottled, with concentrated skin tone-evening ingredients such as ascorbyl glucoside and [niacinamide](#). A study of 144 women conducted by the brand showed that it **reduced dark spots and uneven tone after two weeks**. It's also an Amazon favorite and can be found in drugstores. "From the first night, I saw, and felt, a difference in my skin," shares one reviewer. "The next morning, it felt more hydrated and smooth." The brand says the serum delivers best results when paired with [Olay Luminous Tone Perfecting Cream](#). A warning if you are scent sensitive: a few reviewers noted that they didn't like the fragrance of the formula (although most didn't mind it).

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BEST LINE-REDUCING VITAMIN C SERUM
Kiehl's Powerful-Strength Line-Reducing Concentrate



\$100 AT KIEHL'S

CREDIT: KIEHL'S

PROS

- ⊕ Smooths out fine lines
- ⊕ Good for mature skin

CONS

- ⊗ May leave skin feeling greasy

This Kiehl's lightweight cream formula uses 10% vitamin C, ascorbyl glucoside and hyaluronic acid to help brighten your skin and improve your skin texture's appearance. The brand claims to even **reduce the look of deep-set wrinkles** and pores over time with continued use. One reviewer noticed an abundance of benefits: "My skin tone evened out, my pores seemed to minimize and the skin looked noticeably soft." Plus, she noticed her fine [lines on her forehead](#) and around her eyes softened as well. One caveat: a few users noted that it left skin feeling a little greasy after applying.

BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR SENSITIVE SKIN
Mary Kay TimeWise Replenishing Serum C+E



\$60 AT MARY KAY

CREDIT: MARYKAY

PROS

- ⊕ Age-defying formula is great for mature skin
- ⊕ Gentle enough for sensitive skin
- ⊕ Combines three sources of vitamin C

CONS

- ⊗ May not be effective on all skin types

The Mary Kay TimeWise line is nothing new to the Good Housekeeping Institute team: For years, GH Beauty Lab experts have been recommending TimeWise products for various skincare concerns. This GH Seal star replenishing serum **contains vitamin C and E for an age-defying combination**. Clinical studies have shown the serum is generally mild and does not bother testers with [sensitive skin](#).

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BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR DRY SKIN
La Roche-Posay Active Vitamin C 10%



\$50 AT LA ROCHE-POSAY SKINCARE

<p>PROS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">⊕ Moisturizing cream formula⊕ Gentle enough for sensitive skin	<p>CONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">⊗ Strong aroma
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Ideal for dry skin, this serum from La Roche-Posay has a creamier formula that contains 10% vitamin C and [hyaluronic acid](#), which is great for hydrating and plumping skin. The brand also claims it helps to fill lines and fight wrinkles. La Roche-Posay thermal spring water is said to "repel free radicals and soothe skin." After using it daily for a little over a month, one reviewer shares that her skin looks brighter and feels smoother. "I had tried other vitamin C creams and this is the first one that did not irritate my sensitive skin." Just an FYI, some users noted the strong scent.

14

BEST LONG-LASTING VITAMIN C SERUM

Paula's Choice C15 Super Booster



\$55 AT DERMSTORE

PROS

- ⊕ Packaging design promotes longer shelf life
- ⊕ Mixes well with other products

CONS

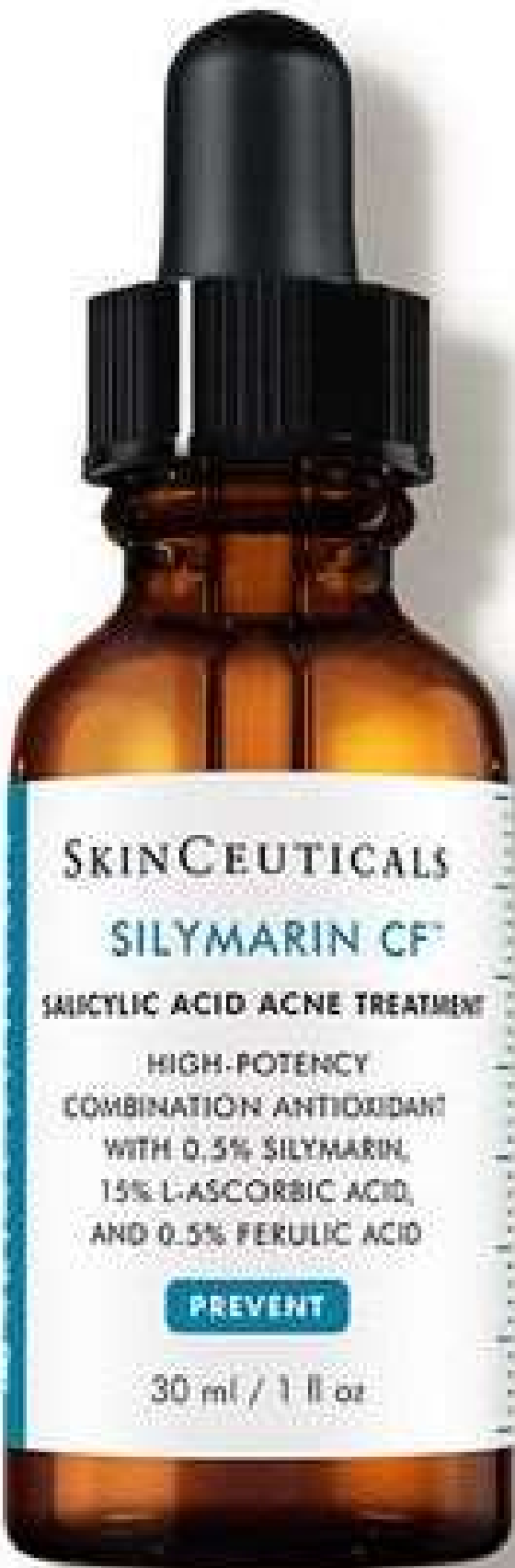
- ⊗ Small size

Paula's Choice C15 Super Booster contains the **trifecta of vitamin C, vitamin E and ferulic acid** that has been shown to have synergistic benefits and help protect vitamin C formulas from losing efficaciousness quickly. The container is opaque so it protects the vitamin C from sunlight, which can degrade it. Thus, this shelf-stable product will last and last, even if you don't use it every day. If you do use it daily, it may run out quickly due to its small size, according to some users. However, multiple reviewers noted that it mixes well with their moisturizers and was easy to use.

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BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR ACNE-PRONE SKIN
SkinCeuticals Silymarin CF Serum



\$169 AT SKINCEUTICALS

CREDIT: SKINCEUTICALS

PROS

- ⊕ Contains acne-fighting active ingredients
- ⊕ Clarifies skin

CONS

- ⊗ Expensive

A GH Beauty Award winner and variation on SkinCeuticals' popular [CE Ferulic serum](#), this formula contains [salicylic acid](#) and is specially **formulated for oily and blemish-prone skin**. Though it's a splurge, it delivers results: “Based on data review, this is effective for improving skin clarity and texture,” Wizemann reports.

16

BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR WRINKLES
BeautyStat Universal C Skin Refiner Vitamin C Treatment



\$80 AT DERMSTORE

CREDIT: BEAUTYSTAT

PROS

- ⊕ Formulated by a cosmetic chemist
- ⊕ Formula is stable; doesn't oxidize

CONS

- ⊗ Pricey

Microscopically encapsulated vitamin C prevents degradation from light and air in this potent and pricey serum from BeautyStat. According to the brand, stabilization and efficacy were of the utmost importance in the development of this formula, which was created by a cosmetic chemist. One reviewer loves that "I don't have to store this product in a dark drawer, because this product doesn't oxidize." In a brand-funded study conducted on 30 women over four weeks, they found that **consumers saw significant improvement in crow's feet and skin firmness.**

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BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR OILY SKIN
Drunk Elephant C-Firma Day Serum



\$78 AT SEPHORA

CREDIT: DRUNK ELEPHANT

<p>PROS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">⊕ Hydrates and plumps skin⊕ Lightweight formula	<p>CONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">⊗ Can be tacky
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A great option for oily complexions, "this serum has the right amount of vitamin C and **brightens, plumps and hydrates**," says Ellen Marmur, M.D., a New York-based dermatologist and founder of [Marmur Metamorphosis Skincare](#). The product contains additional ingredients such as [vitamin E](#), ferulic acid and fruit enzymes that help brighten and smooth the skin's texture. It's also a unique formula: You mix the powder with the liquid once before the first use to maximize the potency of the ingredients. Keep in mind that some reviewers complained about the product being too sticky, but others say it's lightweight and sinks into the skin.

BEST VITAMIN C SERUM FOR DULL SKIN
Sunday Riley C.E.O. 15% Vitamin C Brightening Serum



\$85 AT SEPHORA

CREDIT: SUNDAY RILEY

<p>PROS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">⊕ Fades dark spots⊕ Makes skin glow	<p>CONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">⊗ Can leave skin a little shiny
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Several online reviewers admit that this serum is a tad overpriced, but most agree that it really works. "In three weeks, I have seen a huge change in my skin," shares one Sephora reviewer. "My dark spots have reduced significantly." It contains 15% vitamin C to **help lighten dark spots, smooth fine lines and minimize the appearance of pores**. Just apply sparingly as it can leave skin shiny if overused.

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