



Streaks ahead

We asked 62 people to try self-tanning products, including green alternatives. Find out the results, and why you shouldn't buy wipes

Gone are the days of eating kilos of carrots or gallons of tomato soup to get a healthy glow without sunbathing. With so many self-tan products on the market, there's an easier way to get summer colour without the dangers of using a sunbed (see *Which?*, May 2008, p38). And thanks to our user trial test (see 'Our research', p32), you can also avoid those fake-tan giveaways: orange skin, streaky bits and an unpleasant smell.

What's on the market?

There are two main types of product: those that you can use daily to build up a gradual tan; and instant-tan lotions, sprays, wipes, gels and mousses designed for a single application, lasting two to ten days. We gave a total of 24 products to 62 people to find out which they thought were best.

Our testers told us that the upmarket premium products are significantly better overall for colour, smell and an even finish – but for instant tans a cheaper one was their overall favourite.

Our users voted the tanning wipes on test the least popular, particularly for colour. Caitlin Marnell used TanTowel Evolution wipes, which our users scored the lowest of any product on test, and said: 'They gave a very uneven finish: patches, streaky orange legs – a complete mess!'

We also asked an expert to evaluate the ingredients of products with green, natural or chemical-free claims, and asked three regular fake tanners to try them out. See 'Back to nature', p32, to find out more, and to learn how we successfully challenged Origins' misleading claim that its products were chemical-free.



If you don't fancy applying fake tan yourself, you could go to a salon to be sprayed in an automated booth or by a technician using an airbrush. But our users were generally disappointed with the results (see p32).

'TanTowel Evolution wipes gave a very uneven finish: patches, and streaky orange legs'

Safety of fake tan

Fake or self-tans contain a naturally derived sugar called dihydroxyacetone (DHA). This reacts with the dead cells in the outer layer of your skin to create a brown colour. Some products also contain erythrulose, which works in the same way as DHA.

The British Association of Dermatologists told us: 'On rare occasions fake tans may cause a skin reaction. However, this is usually thought to be due to other ingredients used rather than the DHA, such as one of the fragrances or preservatives.'

Chris Flower of the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association says: 'Check the "product after opening" date. This indicates the time a cosmetic lasts once opened, without harm to the user. Poor storage or exposure to air can lead to reduced effectiveness and a slightly higher risk of allergy.'

When tans are sprayed professionally in salons, the salon has a responsibility to assess any risk to you. See our 'Checklist', p32, for tips on ensuring your safety.

Most importantly, however brown you look, remember you are still untanned and – unless the product specifically contains sun protection – unprotected. See p26 for the results of our latest sunscreens test.

Our users overwhelmingly chose a natural, realistic-looking colour as the key measure of success. Use their experiences and our 'Checklist', p32, to help you get the perfect tan, without the need for sun.

TANNING PILLS

Some tanning pills aren't permitted in the UK, but we could still buy them online

Tanning pills that are not allowed in the UK have potentially serious side effects, including an eye disorder, liver damage and severe itching.

We were able to buy these pills from a website in the US, where tanning pills are not approved by the US public health watchdog, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

We contacted the FDA, which told us that our pills are legal because they're sold as a dietary supplement.



But we still question why – if they're not tanning pills – they were sold to us from a website called Tanningpills.com.

The side effects in these pills are caused by excessive levels of canthaxanthin – a colour additive that enters the bloodstream and the skin tissue, giving a tan-like colour. This is different from vitamin pills that claim to optimise or accelerate tanning – go to www.which.co.uk/selftans to find out more about these.

Gradual tans

Our testers found these easier to apply, with less streakiness and a better finish than instant tans

These are body lotions or moisturisers containing lower levels of DHA, so you can build or top up your colour daily.

All our gradual tans were easy to apply and gave an even finish, which makes them good for first-time users of fake tan. However, you may need time to let them dry. Betty Wallace said that Dove Summer Glow Body Lotion, which scored top marks for application, 'went on very smoothly. However, it took a long time to rub in, as it was quite greasy. It felt like I had a lasting film on my skin.'

Our users said that the colour of gradual tans is 'subtle' and 'gentle'. The overall first choice

was gradual tan St Tropez Everyday Daily Moisturiser, priced at £12.95. One tester, Mark Walker, said: 'This looks like a proper suntan and smells quite nice. I've been told by several people that I look "well"!'

Smell

Our users rated gradual tans lower for smell, and said the smell can change on your skin.

Johnson's has advertised its reformulated Holiday Skin Body Lotion by saying: 'No one will ever know... there's no giveaway after-smell.' But our users didn't

agree, giving it their lowest smell rating for a gradual tan.

User favourites

St Tropez Everyday Daily Moisturiser, £12.95, came out best overall. But Nivea Body Sunkissed Skin, £5.99, and Dove Summer Glow Body Lotion, £4.99, did slightly better for colour – they're cheaper, too.



We tested: Dove Summer Glow Body Lotion, £4.99; Johnson's Holiday Skin Body Lotion, £4.99; Nivea Body Sunkissed Skin, £5.99; St Tropez Everyday Daily Moisturiser, £12.95; Vichy Lipidiose Nutri-sun, £11

'The finish was quite even but some drier areas stained, such as my knees, elbows and knuckles.'

Millie Ferrier:
Nivea Body Sunkissed Skin



'My skin is normally dry, even after moisturiser. But it was well moisturised after using this product.'

Sian Deakin:
Vichy Lipidiose Nutri-sun



Instant tans

There's lots of variation on instant-tan colour and ease of applying, so choose carefully

With a range of products on sale, from mousses to lotions and sprays, we were surprised that our users didn't prefer a particular type, and that they chose a cheaper overall favourite.

Colour

Many products allow you to choose the right colour for your skin, with the makers claiming that the colour develops immediately or overnight – most commonly over a few hours.

Our instant-tan testers valued an even finish on their skin, but reported more streakiness than the gradual

tan users. Charlotte Tasker developed 'streaks' as her Boots Soltan Beautiful Bronze Non Tinted Lotion tan faded.

Some prefer to see a tint or sheen as they apply their tan so they can tell if it's going on evenly – see picture below – whereas others favour a colourless product.



To help you get that perfect look, the clarity of the instructions is important. Testers complained that some were waffly, too small to read, or gave inadequate information.



User favourites

L'Oréal Sublime Bronze Self-Tanning Milk Fluid, £11.99, was the overall winner in our trial. But Boots Soltan Beautiful Bronze Self Tan Non Tinted Mousse, £7.99, came out best for colour.

We tested: Boots Soltan Beautiful Bronze Non Tinted Lotion, £7.49; Boots Soltan Beautiful Bronze Self Tan Non Tinted Mousse, £7.99; California Tan Tinted Self Tanner Airbrush Spray, £19.99; Clarins Self Tanning Milk With Sun Protection, £16.50; Fake Bake Beyond Bronze Self-Tanning Lotion, £24.95; Garnier Ambre Solaire No Streaks Bronzer Mousse, £9.99; Lancôme Flash Bronzer Self-Tanning Magic Mousse, £19.50; Lancôme Flash Bronzer Airbrush, £19.50; L'Oréal Sublime Bronze Multiposition Self-tanning Spray, £11.99; L'Oréal Sublime Bronze Self-Tanning Milk Fluid, £11.99; Nivea Sun Self Tan Spray, £9.99; Piz Buin Summer Sensation Spray, £11.99; Simple Body Self Tan Mousse, £4.49; St Tropez Mousse, £20; Superdrug Solait Self-Tan Lotion, £5.99

'The only drawback was the mahogany colour of my hands, despite thorough washing. My nails also went very yellow for about a week.'

Sue Barber: Clarins Self Tanning Milk With Sun Protection



'There were few instructions, so I ended up over-applying. I used three quarters of the bottle and was extremely dark, but had a white face and hands. I couldn't go swimming for a week!'

James Ventharn:
Lancôme Flash Bronzer Airbrush



Wipes tested: Estée Lauder Sun Performance Go Tan Sunless Towlette, £18.50 (for 10); Garnier Ambre Solaire No Streaks Bronzer, £2.39 (2); Nivea Sun Self Tan Wipe, £1.29 (1); TanTowel Evolution Total Body Towlette, £1.50 (1)

SALON TANS – TREAT WITH CAUTION

Our mystery shoppers give us their verdict on their local tanning salon services

We asked three people to get a spray tan applied by their local salon. They each paid £20.

Which? member Gretel Nevols was disappointed, saying there was 'nowhere near enough of a colour change to be called a tan'.

The staff put her at ease and offered her a clothing choice – from a swimsuit to topless – but the lack of colour means she won't return.

Katya Carew-Jones was shocked that she turned strong shades of orange and mahogany, despite choosing the lightest tan at England-wide chain The Tanning Shop. She said: 'It didn't feel like a pampering session, as instructions were given too quickly, and there was little ventilation in the booth. Every time I took a breath, I'd cough.'

An alternative to going to a

salon is to use a mobile tanning service, as Janet Spratt, a member from Northern Ireland, did.

A tent was set up in her living room and Janet was then sprayed. 'It was an easy option as I care for two very elderly people,' said Janet, who would have found it difficult to go to a salon. However, she too was disappointed with the result.



Before and after: Gretel, left, said she lacked colour; Katya was shocked by the strong shade

Back to nature

We investigate whether chemical-free, organic or green self-tans are all they're cracked up to be

We asked consultant chemist Dr Anthony Dweck to examine the ingredients of three green products, and got three self-tan users to try them out.

According to Dr Dweck, it's impossible for a self-tan to be completely natural: 'In making the base, manufacturers have to turn to naturally derived ingredients – natural ones that have been chemically processed – or substances produced synthetically, not starting from nature.'

Origins The Great Pretender, £13.50 Dr Dweck says: 'An online Origins advert claimed its product had: "All natural ingredients. No chemicals". To claim "no chemicals" rather than, say, "no added chemicals" is nonsense – the air we breathe is several chemicals – and it contains synthetic ingredients, such as

silicones, which give the skin a luxury feel.'

Origins admitted that the online ad was misleading and removed it.

According to our user: 'The tan was deep and natural. It initially smelt minty but developed a strong chemical smell.'

Lavera Natural Cosmetics Sun Sensitiv Self-Tanning Lotion, £9.75 Lavera claims its self-tan is '100% natural or naturally derived'. Dr Dweck says: 'It's an honest and quality product, but while it has no added chemicals it's impossible for it to be completely chemical-free as claimed by Lavera. And some 'natural essential oils' listed in the ingredients are in fact allergens – the potentially damaging chemicals that are a



part of those oils – which Lavera should clarify.'

Our user says: 'The lotion was creamy with a nice colour, although it smelt a bit strong.'

Green People Self Tan Lotion, £14.99 Dr Dweck says: 'It probably comes as close to nature as possible.'

Our user says: 'The lotion had a nice, creamy texture, but I couldn't see much difference in my colour and smelt like a stick of celery! I'd have to use a lot of plastic bottles of this to maintain my tan, which wouldn't be green.'

Checklist

Essential self-tan advice

■ **How to buy** Do you want to build up a subtle glow over a few days (gradual tan) or get a deep, quick colour for a party tonight (instant tan)? Check the instructions are easy to understand. If you want to see the colour as you apply, get a tinted product. Think about your budget; our users say you usually get what you pay for.

■ **Green credentials** If you are looking for a green product, check the ingredients as you would for other cosmetic products and remember that natural doesn't actually mean chemical-free.

■ **Safety** Skin reactions to self-tans are rare, but try some on a patch of skin if you are a first-time user or have had a reaction before. If you have a salon spray tan, try not to inhale the spray, and discuss with the salon – or your GP – if you have asthma or respiratory problems. Remember that self-tanning products don't protect you from the sun.

■ **Pregnant** Don't use fake tan during pregnancy. NHS Direct says: 'Changes in hormone levels can make the skin more sensitive than normal.'

■ **Best results** Before you apply, exfoliate to get rid of dry skin. Either moisturise your hands or wear latex gloves to avoid staining them. Moisturise your skin after application to prolong your colour.

OUR RESEARCH

In February and March 2008, 62 men and women aged 16 to 70 tried a total of 24 self-tanning products and rated them on factors including application, colour, finish, instructions, price and smell.

In addition, three users each tried a green self-tan, and a further three tried a professional spray tan.