

13 Dark Spot Remedies You Can Find In Your Kitchen

Whether left behind from acne, brought on from age or from sun exposure, stubborn dark spots—also known as hyperpigmentation—are the bane of makeup-free complexions. Treatment for hyperpigmentation typically calls for three main avenues: prevention, fading, and gradual removal. Derms have long relied upon controversial [hydroquinone](#) for its skin-lightening effects, but research [turned up several health concerns](#) that have us seeking alternative means. Luckily, there are several natural ingredients that can be found in our kitchens to tackle hyperpigmentation on the spot. Pun intended.

1. Aloe vera

[Aloe vera](#) has been an anecdotal skin care savior for quite some time. The skin-healing properties come from the healthy chemical makeup, which includes [vitamins, enzymes, minerals, salicylic acids, and amino acids](#). A recent study review found that [aloe vera juice also has a chemical called aloesin](#), which may help heal acne-related hyperpigmentation when applied topically.

2. Indian gooseberry

"Amla fruit [also called indian gooseberry] extract is an ultra-potent source of [vitamin C](#) and other antioxidant compounds," says Michelle Hure, skin care expert at [OC Skin Lab](#). "It inhibits melanin pigment by blocking [the] pigmentation pathway, making it comparable to hydroquinone—without the same risks or side effects." Worth noting: [Studies back up the photo-damage claims](#). Furthermore, [studies also reveal it also inhibits bacterial growth](#), aids in wound healing, and promotes collagen production. (Yes, please.) It's easy to use, too. Simply take the powder, mix it with water, and use it as a gentle face scrub once a week. Not only are you getting the antioxidants, but you're getting a light physical exfoliation too.

3. Lemon, grapefruit, oranges, kiwi, yuzu, or plum

Board-certified dermatologist Lily Talakoub of [McLean Dermatology & Skincare Center](#) points out that these tasty fruits are all packed with ascorbic acid, a naturally occurring form of vitamin C. The antioxidant is popular for brightening complexions and fading spots because it addresses both prevention and fading while also mitigating the damage of environmental causes such as sun damage. It even expedites the healing of scars.

Simply dab a bit of lemon juice directly onto the dark spot. Bear in mind, however, that citrus juice can result in significant photosensitivity, something that will make UV-aging and dark spots *worse*. Be sure to never apply it directly before going into the sun. And even then, remember to wear a hat, slather on the [safe SPF](#), or opt for some Kakadu plum oil for a less sun-sensitizing option.

4. Tomatoes

The body converts the antioxidant beta-carotene, found in red-orange fruits and vegetables, into vitamin A—the natural form of [retinol](#). As Morgan Rabach, dermatologist and co-founder of [LM Medical](#), explains, the active ingredient exfoliates away pigmented cells on the surface of the skin, while it simultaneously stalls skin-darkening melanin from forming deeper pathways in the skin. While gentler than its prescription form, Rabach warns that natural sources of retinol, like carrot oil, will never be as potent as its clinical counterpart. Still, if you're interested in a healthy aging, collagen-boosting pick that smooths fine lines and wrinkles, vitamin-A-rich ingredients are a solid choice. Plus, it's rich in carotenoids, particularly β -carotene and lycopene, [tomatoes also pack a punch for UV protection and skin cancer prevention](#). (Not an excuse to skip SPF, however.) For your DIY method: Try pureeing fresh, organic tomatoes into a paste for a mask.

5. Kombucha

It turns out that fermented tea, or kombucha, improves both digestion ^{*and*} complexions. The probiotic-packed, antioxidant powerhouse brightens and evens skin tone in two ways. First, the [anti-inflammatory effect of the elixir's components](#) can help to prevent inflammatory scarring resulting from skin irritants, as well as acne and [eczema](#). Secondly, it contains a compound that [boosts collagen production](#), generating new, unpigmented skin cells more quickly. Keep in mind, however, that the most effective skin care formulations are not the same as our drinkable beverages. But if you want to try it at home, kombucha makes an effective toner: Apply it with a pad post-face-wash.

6. Apple cider vinegar

[Apple cider vinegar](#) is one of the most popular DIY beauty remedies. To start, the antibacterial and antimicrobial properties of apple cider vinegar help to prevent breakouts while its anti-inflammatory effects reduce the risk of scarring. But ACV also contains malic acid, an exfoliating alpha-hydroxy acid that removes dead skin cells marred by pigmentation. Used as a spot treatment or toner, this can result in a brighter, more even skin tone. Before using apple cider vinegar, remember that AHAs result in sun sensitivity and to always dilute it with water before applying directly to skin.

7. Licorice extract

"Licorice root extract comes from the root of a legume plant and contains several antioxidant compounds, with Glabridin being the main agent," states Hure. "While licorice root hasn't been well studied as a depigmenting agent, it is very promising as a daily adjunct to sunscreen to prevent UV and post-inflammatory pigmentation." [This study](#) identifies licorice root extract as both a tyrosinase inhibitor and a melanogenesis inhibitor, which—in English—means that the root extract can help prevent the development and worsening of dark spots over time.

8. Dried cranberry leaves, blueberry, bearberry, pear trees, pear skin

[Arbutin is the plant-derived form of hydroquinone](#), one of the most-cited hyperpigmentation treatments in skin care, which is less toxic to cells than its prescription counterpart. Like licorice root extract, it works by [inhibiting tyrosinase](#), the primary enzyme responsible for the formation of melanin in the skin. Hure shares that Arbutin can be effective but that it is less so than kojic acid and that a couple of caveats

exist. "Higher concentrations of Arbutin can actually cause hyperpigmentation," she begins. "[Studies show that the synthetic form, Deoxyarbutin](#), is a much more potent lightening agent and antioxidant [that is] on par with hydroquinone—and considerably safer." Read: Maybe try a store-bought formulation for this one.

9. Horseradish

Naturally high in vitamin C and antioxidants, [horseradish has healing properties](#) that have been shared anecdotally in traditional Chinese medicine for ages. Due to its antioxidant content, [studies have shown it to be an effective anti-inflammatory](#), too, which can help with post-inflammatory hyperpigmentation especially. Most suggest mixing horseradish powder with another brightening agent—most often you hear apple cider vinegar—to make it more potent.

10. Papaya

Papain is a protein-consuming enzyme found in unripe papaya that aids in the [healing of raised scars](#) when applied topically to the skin, making the active especially promising in cases of post-inflammatory pigmentation, scarring, and uneven skin texture. "When used topically, papain breaks down the bonds between cells on the outer layer of the skin, thereby exfoliating them off," explains Hure. She warns, however, that [studies have shown that it can have inflammatory and irritating effects on the skin](#).

11. Sake

Thanks to the fermentation process that transforms rice into wine, sake possesses a natural compound called [kojic acid](#), an ingredient with clinically verified, skin-brightening effects. NYC-based plastic surgeon [Melissa Doft](#) says that kojic acid decreases the melanin in the skin, thereby lightening spots and evening out your overall skin tone. As an added benefit, sake skin care products are lauded for their ability to improve skin texture and hydrate, to boot.

12. Organic unsweetened yogurt

Yogurt's probiotics are beneficial for the [skin's microbiome](#), while the gentle exfoliant, lactic acid, helps to even skin tone. "Lactic acid helps by exfoliating dead skin cells, leaving a more evened-out skin tone," Rabach says. It's great for whipping up a [DIY mask](#) with some honey, berries, or even a capsule of probiotics. Always opt for organic, unflavored yogurt, which will help minimize exposure to processed sugar, antibiotics, and hormones.

13. Raspberries, strawberries, and cherries

[Alpha-hydroxy acids](#)—including glycolic, citric, lactic, malic, and tartaric acids—can be found in berries along with a heaping dose of free-radical-fighting antioxidants. They are fantastic brightening agents for their small molecule size and deep penetration, sloughing off thousands of surface-level cells and cuing the body to begin repair *without* causing inflammation. With regular use, you can expect smooth, clear, more even skin tone. However, it is important to remember that these tingling agents can be irritating to the skin, and should only be used with caution along with your other exfoliating ingredients.

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