

VOGUE

***Vogue's* Guide to the Best Japanese Skin-Care Products**

Iman Balagam | August 5, 2024



Photo: Courtesy of Sekkisei

A Japanese beauty ritual is all about being gentle, effective, and consistent—and the best Japanese skin-care products are reflective of this holistic approach. Esthetician Erica Choi explains that the Japanese philosophy involves multiple steps designed to address specific needs and contribute to overall skin health over time. “Key steps include double cleansing, layering lightweight hydrating products, and using sun protection, all aimed at achieving a clear, radiant complexion.”

There’s a wealth of products to discover in Japan, and while some can only be snagged by taking a trip out East with a checked bag, plenty of the best Japanese skin-care products can now be delivered straight to your doorstep. Navigating these options can be confusing, especially with the language barrier, but we went ahead and curated a list of the best Japanese skin-care products according to *Vogue* staffers and experts.

Best for a Glow: Tatcha The Dewy Skin Cream

- **Why we love it:** The reason so many people have this face cream on their vanity is because it truly works to hydrate and nourish the skin. It's formulated with a blend of Japanese botanicals and other moisturizers, including Hadasei-3, which is made of green tea, rice, and algae. Board-certified facial and reconstructive plastic surgeon **Dr. Kimberly Lee** explains that these ingredients are rich in antioxidants, providing deep hydration that helps give a dewy finish and plump the skin. It also contains Japanese purple rice, known for its soothing and anti-inflammatory properties, which helps to calm any irritation and/or redness.
- **Key ingredients:** Hyaluronic acid, red algae, hadasei-3, squalane, Japanese purple rice
- **Skin type:** Dryness, dullness, fine lines, wrinkles
- **Size:** 50 mL



Best Sunscreen: Sekkisei Herbal UV Defense Gel

- **Why we love it:** Japanese sunscreens are cosmetically advanced compared to what we have in the U.S., which is why you might want to consider incorporating them in your routine. With a lightweight gel texture, this sunscreen provides SPF 50+ PA++++ protection against harmful UV rays. "Infused with a blend of herbal extracts such as Job's Tears seed extract, angelica gigas root extract, and licorice root extract, it hydrates and brightens the skin, leaving it feeling refreshed and radiant without a greasy residue," explains Choi.
- **Key ingredients:** Coix seed extract, angelica gigas root extract, licorice root extract
- **Skin type:** Dry, combo, normal skin
- **Size:** 1 oz



Best Cleansing Oil: DHC Deep Cleansing Oil

- **Why we love it:** Washing your makeup off at the end of a long day can seem cumbersome, but this cleansing oil melts everything away so quickly that it no longer feels like a chore. “A popular skin-care product known for effectively removing makeup, dirt, and impurities without stripping the skin of its natural oils, this cleanser is formulated with nourishing olive oil and vitamin E,” says Choi. She adds that it helps maintain the skin’s moisture balance while providing antioxidant benefits.
- **Key ingredients:** Organic olive oil, rosemary leaf oil, vitamin E
- **Skin type:** All skin types
- **Size:** 6.7 oz



Best Essence: SK-II Facial Treatment Essence

- **Why we love it:** Often dubbed “miracle water,” this pitera-based essence is rich in vitamins, amino acids, minerals, and organic acids. “This essence improves skin texture, brightens, and provides hydration, contributing to a more youthful and radiant appearance,” Choi raves. If you’re nervous about adding it to your routine, Dr. Lee reassures that there are minimal additives, and its clean and simple formulation minimizes the risk of irritation, making it suitable for sensitive skin.
- **Key ingredients:** SK-II’s Pitera
- **Skin type:** Dry, combo, normal skin
- **Size:** 75 mL



Best Cleanser: Kanebo Sensai Silky Purifying Milky Soap

- **Why we love it:** Luxurious and gentle, this milky soap effectively removes impurities and makeup while maintaining the skin's natural moisture balance. "Thanks to its creamy and hydrating formula, it leaves the skin feeling exceptionally smooth, soft, and refreshed, making it a popular choice for those who desire a thorough yet gentle cleansing experience," says Choi.
- **Key ingredients:** Koishimaru silk, carrot extract
- **Skin type:** Dry skin
- **Size:** 150 mL



Best Serum: Tatcha The Silk Serum

- **Why we love it:** For those with mature skin, consider Tatcha's The Silk Serum which addresses multiple signs of aging, including fine lines, wrinkles, and uneven skin texture. Dr. Lee explains that it's formulated with liquid silk protein, derived from fibroin silk, which helps to smooth and nourish the skin, providing a silky finish. The serum also includes Japanese seaweed for its anti-inflammatory and soothing properties, and Hadasei-3, which goes beyond surface hydration to deliver nutrients deeper into the skin.
- **Key ingredients:** Upcycled cranberry extract, sea fennel, silk protein, hadasei-3
- **Skin type:** All skin types
- **Size:** 30 mL



Best Eye Cream: Shiseido Benefiance Wrinkle Smoothing Eye Cream

- **Why we love it:** Perfect for nighttime use, this moisturizing and hydrating eye cream effectively targets fine lines around the delicate eye area. It also has a brightening effect, giving a more awake and youthful appearance—in case you forget your nightly magnesium mocktail or miss your eight hours of sleep. Dr. Lee adds, “It’s particularly appealing for those with mature skin or signs of aging around the eyes.”
- **Key ingredients:** Peptides, squalane, ginseng extract, turmeric
- **Skin type:** Dry, combo, normal skin
- **Size:** 15 mL



Best Gel Cream: Hada Labo Tokyo Skin Plumping Gel Cream

- **Why we love it:** The secret to this intensely hydrating gel-cream lies in its trademarked Super Hyaluronic Acid, which, according to Choi, “provides long-lasting moisture, helping to plump the skin and reduce the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles.” Additionally, the formula contains collagen, arginine, and ceramide, which for under \$20, is a major steal.
- **Key ingredients:** Hyaluronic acid, collagen, arginine, ceramide
- **Skin type:** Fine lines, wrinkles
- **Size:** 1.76 fl. Oz.



Best Face Moisturizer: Obagi Hydrate Facial Moisturizer

- **Why we love it:** Well-known in Japan, this moisturizer provides long-lasting hydration and improves the skin's overall texture. Dr. Lee explains that the key ingredient—hydromanil—is an advanced compound derived from the tara seed, which helps retain water in the skin and gradually release it over time. It also contains glycerin, which attracts water to the skin to help maintain moisture levels; shea butter, an emollient that softens the skin; mango butter, which moisturizes with its fatty acids; and avocado oil, which protects the skin from environmental damage.
- **Key Ingredients:** Shea butter, mango butter, tara seed extract
- **Skin type:** All skin types
- **Size:** 1.7 oz



Best Cleansing Balm: Perfect One Focus Smooth Cleansing Balm

- **Why we love it:** Cleansing balms are an integral part of the J-beauty routine, so it's no surprise that one of the most popular ones is self-described as perfect. It combines oils like sunflower and olive oil to dissolve makeup and impurities, along with emollients to soothe and soften the skin. Additionally, it contains botanicals and extracts known for their soothing, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory properties, explains Dr. Lee. If you're someone who loves a full beat, this is a great option as it breaks down makeup without requiring any harsh scrubbing.
- **Key ingredients:** Natural citrus essential oils
- **Skin type:** Dry, combo, normal skin
- **Size:** 2.64 oz



Best Makeup Wipes: Koh Gen Do Spa Cleansing Water Cloth

- **Why we love it:** Cleansing wipes often get a bad rap, but these spa water cloths might be the exception. According to Choi, the fabric is exceptionally gentle, removing makeup without tugging on the skin as some wipes do. We almost never travel without them—and unlike harsh astringents—these wipes use micellar water to remove makeup, leaving the skin feeling clean, soft, and refreshed. While it depends on personal preference, there are also multiple options with different aromas, which can feel calming when you’re far from home.
- **Key ingredients:** Rosemary, sage, white birch sap, and lavender
- **Skin type:** All skin types
- **Size:** 10 cloths per pack



Best For Textured Skin: Kikumasamune Moisturizing Hydrating Japanese Body & Skin Toning Lotion

- **Why we love it:** Infused with sake and a blend of moisturizing ingredients, this product effectively replenishes the skin’s moisture, enhancing its texture and tone. Choi says, “The lightweight formula absorbs quickly, providing a refreshing and smooth finish while helping to improve overall skin hydration and elasticity.” The last thing we want is for you to feel stickiness on your skin, and thankfully, you’ll forget you ever applied this product—except for how great your skin looks afterward.
- **Key ingredients:** Junmai Ginjo sake, amino acids
- **Skin type:** Dry and rough skin
- **Size:** 500 mL



Best Hyaluronic Acid: Hada Labo Gokujun Premium Hyaluronic Solution

- **Why we love it:** Why settle for just one type of hyaluronic acid when you can benefit from a high concentration of several types? For those seeking intense hydration—especially dry skin types or anyone dealing with the drying effects of winter radiators—this product is ideal. Its lightweight, non-greasy texture absorbs quickly, making it a top choice. Choi is also a fan, saying, “It delivers deep and long-lasting moisture to the skin, helping to plump and smooth fine lines while maintaining a supple texture.”
- **Key ingredients:** Nano hyaluronic acid, super hyaluronic acid, hyaluronic acid
- **Skin type:** All skin types
- **Size:** 170 mL



Best for Dry Skin: Curel Japanese Skin Care Facial Cleansing Oil

- **Why we love it:** This inexpensive, no-frills, gentle cleanser does a great job removing sunscreen and excess oils at the end of the day. Plus, it’s fragrance-free and safe for sensitive skin types, so you don’t need to worry about irritation. Choi agrees that it’s one of the best cleansing oils out there, saying, “It effortlessly dissolves makeup, dirt, and excess sebum without causing irritation or stripping the skin of its natural moisture. Infused with ceramides, it helps to maintain the skin’s protective barrier, ensuring a soft, hydrated, and comfortable feel after cleansing.”
- **Key ingredients:** Ceramides
- **Skin type:** Dry, sensitive skin
- **Size:** 150 mL



Why use Japanese beauty products?

According to Vicky Tsai, founder of Tatcha and one of our favorite skin-care gurus, a key difference in the Eastern approach to beauty is the concept of holistic care. “In Japan, caring for the skin is seen as caring for the mind, and this belief has shaped their approach to skincare. Our skin reflects and affects our inner health, so true skincare requires taking care of all aspects of yourself,” says Tsai. “The Japanese have long understood that what you put into your body affects how it looks and feels.” That’s why, she continues, a traditional Japanese diet is rooted in longevity-boosting ingredients like rice, green tea, and algae—superfoods credited with the country’s long lifespans. “And because what’s good for the body is good for the skin, these same ingredients have been central to classical Japanese beauty rituals for centuries.”

Due to the intense heat and humidity during the summer months, Japanese skincare also focuses on sun protection that remains effective even in challenging conditions. “Many sunscreens are resistant to sweating and water, and powerful cleansers are designed to remove sunscreen and excess oils thoroughly. Primers and setting sprays are popular to ensure makeup stays intact throughout the day,” says Choi.

Meet The Experts

- [Dr. Kimberly Lee](#) is a board-certified facial and reconstructive plastic surgeon based in Beverly Hills, California.
- Erica Choi is a licensed esthetician and the founder of Superegg.
- Vicky Tsai is the co-founder of Tatcha.

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