



Sunscreen or Sunblock? A Dermatologist Weighs in, and Plant-Based Pros Share Favorite Brands

By Courtney Davison
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Sunscreen or sunblock? Mineral or chemical? Reef-safe? If reading sun care labels leaves you squinting in confusion, you're not alone. We asked a dermatologist to break down what matters most—and tapped trusted plant-based voices to share the products they actually use.

Mineral Sunblocks vs. Chemical Sunscreens

Sun-protection products generally fall into two categories: mineral (aka physical) sunblocks and chemical sunscreens. Both are designed to protect your skin from UV damage, but they work in different ways.

Mineral sunblocks work by forming a barrier that blocks UV rays from penetrating the skin. “Mineral sunblocks are made with zinc oxide and titanium dioxide, and these sunblocks sit on top of the skin, reflecting the damaging UV rays from the sun,” explains board-certified dermatologist Jason Solway, DO.

Chemical sunscreens, on the other hand, absorb UV radiation and convert it into heat, which is then released by the body. These formulas tend to go on more smoothly and invisibly, but they may cause irritation for people with sensitive skin. Additionally, a [2020 FDA study](#) found that compounds from chemical sunscreens can be absorbed into the bloodstream. “This does not

mean that chemical sunscreens are unsafe to use, and as of right now, they are still deemed safe by the FDA,” Solway says. Still, he recommends opting for mineral-only sunblocks. “They offer broad spectrum UVA/UVB protection and a much lower risk of allergic reaction.” Mineral sunblocks are also safer for the environment, while chemical sunscreens contain compounds that contribute to coral-reef bleaching and [harm marine life in other ways](#).

Solway generally recommends sticking with mineral-only sunblocks for broad-spectrum protection and a lower risk of irritation. But he emphasizes that the most important thing is finding a product you'll actually use. “The best sunscreen is the one you're going to wear,” he says. “Both types work, and both are FDA-approved.” Look for a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30, and be sure to re-apply regularly.

Plant-Based Pros' Favorite Vegan Sunblocks and Sunscreens

Looking for sun protection that's effective and aligned with your values? These vegan-friendly picks come recommended by plant-based cookbook authors, bloggers, and parents who take skin protection seriously.

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Supergoop! Unseen Sunscreen SPF 50 | \$38 at [Supergoop!](#)

“My favorite sunscreen is Unseen Sunscreen by Supergoop,” says Toni Okamoto, author of [Plant-Based on a Budget: Quick & Easy](#), founder of the Plant-Based on a Budget blog, and co-host of the podcast *Plant-Powered People*. “I love how lightweight and invisible it feels on my skin. It goes on smoothly, doesn’t leave a white cast, and doesn’t feel greasy or heavy, even on hot days.” Supergoop also makes a [mineral version](#).



Grown Alchemist Natural Hydrating Sunscreen | \$42 at [Revolve](#)

Jackie Akerberg, author of [The Clean Vegan Cookbook](#) and creator of the blog Jackfruitful, loves Grown Alchemist’s Natural Hydrating Sunscreen (which is actually a mineral-based sunblock). “I love the clean, plant-based ingredients in this formula. It’s creamy but lightweight and easy to rub in, especially for a zinc sunscreen, and it has a sheer finish that doesn’t leave you feeling white and chalky. It also protects against UVA and UVB rays.” Akerberg adds, “In a pinch, I will grab Sun Bum or Coola. They are not as clean, as they’re not 100% mineral-based, but they have better ingredients than many mainstream sunscreen options and are certified reef-safe!”

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Thinkbaby SPF 50+ Baby Clear Zinc Sunscreen | \$15 at [Thinkbaby](#)

Brittany Jaroudi, founder of the Jaroudi Family YouTube channel and blog, recommends this all-mineral sunblock, which is formulated for sensitive skin. “I’ve been using Thinksun’s Thinkbaby products for years [to protect my own skin],” Jaroudi says. [Now a new mom](#), Jaroudi says she loves that she can safely use those same products on her son. “I really enjoy how healthy it is for us and the planet.”



Paula's Choice Resist Super-Light Daily Wrinkle Defense Face Sunscreen SPF 30 | \$39 at [Paula's Choice](#)

“This tinted sunblock is my ride-or-die. I’ve worn it every single day for years,” says Forks Over Knives Editor-in-Chief Elizabeth Turner. “The finish is a little glowy but not greasy, and the tint looks so natural on my fair skin that I rarely bother with foundation. I buy three of these on sale every Black Friday and it gets me through the whole year.” [Paula's Choice also sells it on Amazon.](#)



Green Tea SPF 30 | \$34 at [100% PURE](#)

Dusty and Erin Stanczyk, co-authors of [The Happy Healthy Plant-Based Cookbook](#), live in Florida, where they take care to dress themselves and their three young kids in hats and UV-protective long sleeves to limit sun damage. “For the times when we are going to be out for extended periods of time—e.g., in the water or on a long bike ride—we do keep some sun block handy. We look for minimal ingredient mineral sunscreens, such as zinc oxide. Erin especially loves 100% Pure Green Tea SPF 30.” The zinc-based sunblock features aloe and cucumber juice to hydrate thirsty skin while protecting it from damaging rays.