

BEAT YOUR fake-tan PHOBIA

Scarred by memories of orange palms and blotchy calves? Don't be, because the new breed of fake tans guarantees foolproof results, says tan-phobic Grace Timothy

My fear of tanning in the sun started early, with my mother's stark and strange warning: 'If you sunbathe, you'll die!' I was never the carefree child running in and out of the sea – I was always covered head-to-toe in a thick, slimy SPF30 and tucked under a towel. So, as the teenage years dawned and that sun-kissed look became important, I had to resort to faking it. But, as someone with not just fair but ultra-pale skin, self tan has never worked too well for me either.

When I was 16, I tried The Body Shop Watermelon Self Tan on my legs and forgot to match up my arms, chest and face, much to the amusement of my classmates. At university, I used an instant wash-off tan on nights out. Only it was too dark – think chip dipped in gravy – and most of it ended up on the walls, floors and sofas, earning my flat the name Tango Towers. Plus, my lack of tan-eye coordination always resulted in streaks – and trying to eradicate the stains on the palms of my hands with bleach was a particularly low point.

So, like many women I know, when I hit my 20s I decided to put patchy elbows behind me and leave fake tanning to others.

Which was a shame because, as everyone knows, a healthy glow makes you look slimmer, disguises cellulite and evens out your skin tone. But,

thankfully for all of us tan-phobics, the industry has heard our cries from our lotion-spattered bathrooms and things have changed. The market's no longer limited to a couple of one-orange-shade-suits-all sticky lotions that require 30 minutes of walking around like John Wayne, semi-naked, while it dries. With the latest formulas designed for specific skin tones, drying in seconds and, most importantly, easy application, faking it has never been more foolproof.

Tan tones

The latest trends in tanning focus more on creating natural colour and texture than how dark you can go. 'Deep, obvious tans just aren't fashionable any more,' says tanning guru James Read. 'It's now about recreating the flattering glow of candlelight as opposed to a three-weeks-in-the-Caribbean tan. You don't have to be scared of looking fake any more.' And self-tan brands have stepped up to the mark, according to skincare expert Nichola Joss. 'The latest products have skin-hydrating textures and in-built illuminators that create radiant skin with just a breath of colour,' she says. Brands are also introducing erythrulose – a compound that forms a more natural brown colour – to replace DHA (the chemicals that react with the amino acids in your skin to darken it) so that the 'Tango tone' is a thing of the past, too.

So what should someone as fair as me be using? 'You want something really

hydrating and light on colour,' says James. 'Look for a product that is just 2% to 3% DHA, such as a gradual tanner. Or custom-blend your own colour by diluting a tanning lotion with your moisturiser.'

Xen-Tan's Perfect Blend, £34.99, is also geared towards achieving a bespoke colour. Its dual chamber system holds an instant bronzer on one side and self-tan formula on the other, so you can dial the colour up or down for your perfect shade.

But it's not just us pasty types who have more options nowadays – many ranges now include variants for all colourings. If you have a medium skin tone, Nichola recommends choosing the fair to medium products. 'It's far easier to build up colour according to how dark you'd like to go than to take off a tan,' she advises. And if you're olive skinned? There's now a set of deep, dark lotions – Fake Bake, St Tropez and He-Shi really stand out – that will intensify your natural skin shade.

Easy application

So you have the right product for your skin tone, but you'll still be staining your floors, waddling around your bathroom and discovering camo-style blotches, right? Not any more. Fake tan now comes in different formulas that are easier to apply. 'You've got milks, lotions, creams, sprays, mousses – everyone can find something to suit them,' says Nichola.

And there's no hanging around waiting for them to dry, either – it's about tan-and-go today. 'The latest formulations →

are less sticky, less tacky, and you can dress almost immediately with most products,' says James. 'Plus, you don't have to hide away for the rest of the day. By lowering the DHA, the colour guides (the colour you get immediately on application) have been toned down so you can step out right away.'

But what else can we do to avoid patchiness and mess? 'The right tools are essential,' says James. Latex gloves and towel to stand on, right? Not according to James. 'Latex gloves actually pull on your skin, causing smudges and stripes. Mitts, however, provide a soft, flat surface area that buffs on the product in one smooth stroke for an even, patch-free colour.' Keep the gloves on underneath as the stain can still penetrate but a tanning mitt really is the way to go, regardless of the type of tanner you choose.

Scenting victory

It's sounding less scary already. But what about that stale biscuit odour that wafts from your newly brown limbs? 'DHAs are always going to smell,' admits James. 'How strong the smell might be is down to your own personal chemistry and the natural levels of certain proteins in your skin. Brands are scenting their products now, but you can still get that distinctive, stale fragrance.' So is there any escaping the eau de biscuit? 'DHAs build up on your skin, so the best thing to do is have a week-long break every month to allow your skin to breathe. You can use a wash-off product that contains no DHA to keep your colour up in your week off.'

Healthy glow

The best news for us tan-phobics is that faking it can now actually benefit your

skin, as well as flatter it. An increasing number of organic, hydrating ingredients, such as aloe vera, are being introduced so your skin stays soft and smooth, which in turn helps anchor the colour.

'The smoother and more hydrated the canvas, the longer the colour will last, so these new moisturising ingredients have really improved the life span of a tan,' says James. St Tropez has taken this one step further with its new Naturals range, which uses Vegetan, a 100% naturally derived and Ecocert-approved DHA, plus enriching avocado butter and mango seed oil. 'It gives a gentle, subtle colour, so is perfect for really fair skin that tends to be more sensitive,' says Nichola. 'It's great for those of us who just want to look healthy and refreshed.'

Forget that pale and interesting look – I think my phobia may finally be cured! ☑

FIGHT YOUR FAKE-PHOBIA

FEAR OF... STREAKS

The washable He-Shi tanning mitt, £4.50, and the realistic colour guide in He-Shi Express Liquid Tan, £21, make a salon-quality tan easy to achieve. It tans on contact with your skin so you won't miss a single, tiny bit.

FEAR OF... SENSITIVITY

If you have sensitive skin, try St Tropez Naturals Radiance Self Tan for Face, £21, which contains Vegetan and super-softening avocado butter. 'Vegetan is far gentler, less drying and less likely to irritate sensitive patches,' says Nichola.

FEAR OF... MISTAKES

'Wash-off colours are great for novices,' says Nichola. 'There's less commitment – you can remove your tan along with your clothes at the end of the night!' Garnier Ambre Solaire No Streaks Bronzer Wash-Off Gel, £9.99, gives a glossy glow without smelly DHAs.

FEAR OF... WRINKLES

Want to bronze up but reluctant to compromise on your anti-ageing regime? The skincare experts at Clarins have the answer – Instant Smooth Self Tanning, £17, is a super light, moisturising mousse that tackles fine lines while you turn golden brown.

FEAR OF... CHEMICALS

If you usually choose natural skincare, Nuxe has the tan for you: Soleil Prodigious Beautifying Self-Tanning Body Lotion, £27, contains 89% naturally-sourced ingredients, and no mineral oils, parabens or comedogens. Plus, it gives a very natural-looking tan.

FEAR OF... THE SMELL

As James says, it's still tricky to get a scent-free tan, but Xen-Tan Scent Secure, £24.99, neutralises the ugly odour, replacing it with a fresh cucumber-melon fragrance. Apply before and one hour after tanning to lock out the smell.

FEAR OF... THE DARK

Gradual tanners are best for those with fair skin. Johnson's Holiday Skin LightGlow, £4.99, combines daily moisturisation with an extra-light tint that you can build up over three or four days. Exfoliate once a week to keep it looking fresh and smooth.

FEAR OF... UNEVEN FADING

'The more moisturised your skin, the more likely it is that the tan will fade evenly, like a real tan,' says James. So, if you have dry skin, invest in Fake Bake Tanning Body Butter for Dry Skin, £17.50 – it combines high hydration with two bronzers for radiant, long-lasting colour.

tip 'To get a realistic tan, find your holiday snaps and copy what you see, applying more where the sun hits, such as on your nose and cheekbones,' says James.