



# Mane event

Get gorgeous hair at home with our top-rated color kits, pro tips, and great deals on products

Love it or hate it, your hair can make you feel sexy one day and frumpy the next. Many of us try to spend our way to better tresses, snapping up expensive collections of shampoos and styling products and shelling out for haircuts and other salon services.

Based on our new national ShopSmart survey, we figure that the average woman spends about \$195 a year on haircuts and \$260 on color alone. But over a third of us are trying to save money by going to the salon less often. By just going for a cut every six weeks instead of every four, the savings can be \$200 a year. (For more stats about what we do with our hair and how we feel about it, see page 27.)

Another way to save big is to color your hair at home. So we asked our labs to check out home hair color kits. Just for you, we spent about \$10,000 on 500 tresses of human hair with identical amounts of gray in each and had testers dye 470 of them with nine different at-home color kits. Then we gave each sample up to a simulated month's worth of washing and blow-drying (a total of 1,500 washes). For our top picks for both women and men, see pages 24-25.

We also sent our secret shoppers out to compare prices on top-selling shampoos, conditioners, and styling products, in stores and online—so you'll know where to go to get the best deal on the stuff you rely on to keep those good hair days coming!

**UP IN THE HAIR** In our new survey, almost five times as many women said they loved their hair as hated it. But 30 percent were undecided.

TEDFOO/FLICR/GETTY IMAGES

# to dye for

Our tests of hair color kits showed that it's possible to get salon results at home



Dyeing your own hair is obviously a lot more economical than paying a pro to do it for you at a salon. But can those boxes of hair color at the drugstore really cover the grays and keep your hair looking great even after multiple washings? The answer is yes! We tried out nine do-it-yourself dyes ranging in price from \$4 to \$13. Most did a really nice job—and a few were standouts (see our Smart Picks below). We chose dark brown color kits for our test because many manufacturers offer that shade, and we thought it would be the best color to show how well the dye covered gray. (Just beware: Not all dark browns are created equal; see “How Dark Is Dark Brown?” on page 26.) Our testers dyed human hair tresses according to the box instructions, then washed and blow-dried them up to 16 times to simulate a month's worth of every-other-day shampooing. We used a color-reading device called a colorimeter to measure the shade of brown that came out and the trained eyeballs of our sensory panelists to determine how much, if any, gray remained. Unless otherwise noted, all tested dyes are permanent, meaning that they're designed to stick around until your hair grows out.

## best hair color kits



**CLAIROL TEXTURES & TONES, 2N DARK BROWN**  
Price \$7

**Dye time** 45 minutes  
**Why we like it** Although designed for women of color, this kit was great at turning all of our hair samples a deep, warm brown and was easy to use with clear directions. And it had no ammonia, which can irritate the respiratory tract.

**L'ORÉAL PARIS SUPERIOR PREFERENCE, 4 DARK BROWN NATURAL**  
Price \$9

**Dye time** 30 minutes  
**Why we like it** This may be a good pick for women with very long or thick hair, because the package contained more product than many of the others. Plus it was excellent at covering gray. And it was easy to use. It does contain ammonia, though.

**CLAIROL NATURAL INSTINCTS, 28 NUTMEG DARK BROWN**  
Price \$9

**Dye time** 20 minutes  
**Why we like it** This demi-permanent dye (designed to last about 28 washings) gave us a rich nutmeg-y shade without ammonia, and in less than a half-hour. But the color was slightly uneven, and the gloves ripped.

WOMAN DYING HAIR: AGENCIA FREE/ALAMY

## others we tested



**DARK & LOVELY COLOR CONFIDENCE**  
Price \$7

**Dye time** 30 minutes  
**Testers' notes** Designed for women of color, this ammonia-free formula had a generous amount of dye and gave nice gray coverage overall, though our sensory panelists spotted a few undyed streaks and patches peeking through.



**GARNIER 100% COLOR VIBRANT COLORS BY NUTRISSE**  
Price \$7

**Dye time** 30 minutes  
**Testers' notes** This dye came with a larger-than-average helping of product—good for women with a lot of hair—and scored right in the middle of the pack when it came to covering gray. It contains ammonia, though, and the gloves tore on us.



**REVLON COLORSILK BEAUTIFUL COLOR**  
Price \$4

**Dye time** 30 minutes  
**Testers' notes** The least expensive product we tested (and the top-selling hair color kit on the market), this ammonia-free dye did a decent job on gray coverage. But it was the only product we tested that came with an opaque rather than transparent bottle for color mixing, which was a major drag since it left us unable to see whether the product mixed properly. And the gloves ripped.



**CLAIROL NICE 'N EASY COLOR BLEND TECHNOLOGY**  
Price \$7

**Dye time** 45 minutes  
**Testers' notes** This dye from Clairol's flagship line wasn't as nice as the other two Clairol products we chose as our top picks because it left some gray uncovered. Also, it contains ammonia. Still, it came with a generous portion of product. Our testers also said that the color was a darker shade of brown than most.



**CLAIROL NICE 'N EASY PERFECT 10**  
Price \$13

**Dye time** 15 minutes  
**Testers' notes** Also darker than most (and faster, too), this one costs a premium compared with the others. It performed almost identically to the other Nice 'n Easy dye but without streaks. There are other, less-expensive options; see our picks.



**L'ORÉAL PARIS EXCELLENCE-TO-GO**  
Price \$9

**Dye time** 15 minutes  
**Testers' notes** Not excellent, as the name would suggest. It produced streaky, blotchy, and uneven results. It also lost points for containing ammonia and providing less dye than some other products. It also failed to recommend a strand test—standard advice to dye a strand of hair before doing your whole head to make sure the color is what you expect.

## FACE OFF

### get to the roots



VS.



Sometimes you need a little touch-up between dye jobs, so we tested two products designed to cover any visible roots: **Clairol Nice 'n Easy Root Touch-Up** and **Revlon ColorSilk Root Perfect**. We started with 90 percent gray hair, then dyed the bottom portion with a permanent dye and the top with the root product of

the same brand to match the color. (You can also use these with similar colors from other brands, which are listed on the boxes.)

**The winner: REVLON.** It was a better color match, plus it was easier and neater to use. There was a single bottle to mix and apply the color, instead of Clairol's tray and applicator brush. Another bonus: The Revlon kit costs just \$4 vs. \$7 for the Clairol.

## QUICK CONSULT



**Cameron K. Rokhsar, M.D.**, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City

### Is it possible to color too often?

Many salons say that you shouldn't color more often than every four to six weeks, so that's a good guideline to follow at home, too. Overdyeing damages hair. It becomes more brittle, breaks more easily, and loses its sheen.

### Is it safe for pregnant women to color their hair?

There's little evidence that using hair dye has harmful effects on pregnancy, but the subject hasn't been adequately studied. To be safe, wear gloves and try to keep the dye from touching your scalp so that it can't get absorbed.

### Should anyone else be careful?

Some people may develop allergies to an active ingredient, so it's important to do a patch test every time.

## dyes for dudes

Our testers' thoughts on two:

### ■ JUST FOR MEN TOUCH OF GRAY

**Price** \$8  
This comb-in product is designed to gradually darken gray hair to create a kind of salt-and-pepper look. Our testers said it was easy to use and dug the results; most said they'd buy it.

### ■ CLAIROL NATURAL INSTINCTS FOR MEN

**Price** \$8  
Like the women's product, this covered gray handsomely.

# get great color at home

We ask top colorists for their best tips

With a little prodding, even hairdressers will admit that you can get some nice results from home hair color. Today's kits are easier to mix, less apt to drip and stain, and are self-timing—so they leave less room for error than the products of the past, says celebrity hairstylist Alyn Topper. But if you're a newbie, he does recommend a trial run at a salon so that you can study a pro's techniques before you try doing it yourself.

**1 Choose the right color** Highlights and bleaching are tricky to master and should probably be left to a professional. Using a single color to cover gray is much safer to try at home, Topper says. But choosing the right hue can be a real headache. If you're a first-timer, ask your hairdresser's opinion, browse hair color Web sites like Clairol's and L'Oréal's, and choose a demi-permanent color, which will wash out in a month or two. (Most demis promise to last about 24 washings, so if you're really unhappy, you can wash it out sooner.) According to pro colorist Jason Backe of the Ted Gibson Salon in New York City, your safest bet is to find the shade that most closely resembles your own, then buy the color that's one

shade lighter. "This will brighten and soften your complexion," he says. More guidelines: If you have fair skin and blue or green eyes, choose shades with cool tones, which often have the words "ash" or "neutral" in the name. For golden to dark skin and dark eyes, shades with "warm" or "golden" in the name will best suit you. And although it might seem like a hassle, the only way to know whether you'll like the color you picked is to do a strand test according to directions on the box.

**2 Avoid allergic reactions** Hair color contains chemicals, so in addition to a strand test to check color, it's important to perform a patch test to make sure you're not allergic to an ingredient: Rub a tiny bit of dye on the inside of your elbow or behind your ear. Leave it there for two days. If you get a rash, don't use the product! Do both a strand and a patch test each time you color, since formulations can change.

**3 Prep yourself** Before you jump in and do the dye job, you should take a few important prep steps. Read and reread package directions.

"When dealing with dyes there is no room for misunderstandings or misinterpretations," Topper says. Make sure you have all the equipment you need. Most of it (dye, gloves) should come in the box. In addition, long hair clips like the ones hairdressers use are helpful to divide hair into manageable sections to work with. Put on an old robe or shirt that you won't mind getting stained and that you can unbutton or unzip to take off when it's time to hop in the shower to rinse out the dye. And grab an old towel to drape over your shoulders to protect your skin and clothes, plus paper towels to clean up drips. Apply petroleum jelly along the hairline to prevent dye from staining skin, Backe suggests. You can remove stains using an alcohol-based astringent like Sea Breeze.

**4 Glop it on** Apply the dye according to directions, making sure to aim the applicator at your head and away from the shower curtain, bath mat, and walls, which can get stained. Set a timer so that you know when to rinse color out, even though most home kits are self-timing; the color stops working after a certain amount of time so that you can't overdo it. When you're ready for a touch-up, color the exposed roots only. "When new color overlaps existing color, the hair absorbs too much dye," Backe says. "This causes color buildup that makes hair look too dark and flat, like shoe polish."

**5 Fix mistakes** If your results aren't what you expected, call the hotline number on the box or check the company site. If that doesn't help, don't be shy about turning to a pro. In our new survey, 18 percent of women admitted going to a salon to fix a DIY cut or color.

## how dark is dark brown?

Our testers dyed the hair shown here with L'Oréal Paris Superior Preference (one of our Smart Picks), at left, and Clairol Nice 'n Easy Perfect 10, at right. Although both products were marked "dark brown" on the front of the package, this side-by-side comparison shows it's really important to look closely at the box. The photographs on hair-color kits indicate what color you can expect to reach based on your starting color. So be sure to check the back and sides of the box when you're shopping—don't go by hair-color name alone!



# hairy issues

We asked more than 1,000 women about their hair—how they wear it, how much they spend on it (time and money!), whether they love it or hate it. Here's what they told us.

**GENERALLY WE'RE HAPPY WITH OUR HAIR**

- 19% Love it
- 41% Like it
- 5% Dislike it
- 4% Hate it
- 30% Neutral

**But that doesn't mean we don't take steps to change it**

- 49% have naturally straight hair but 10% of them style it curly
- 23% have naturally curly hair but 19% of them style it straight

## Our mane complaints (in order)

1. Too thin or fine
2. The color
3. Too frizzy
4. Too dry or damaged
5. Too thick
6. Takes too long to style
7. Too straight
8. Unmanageable
9. Going gray
10. Falling out, going bald

## WE PAY (on average)

\$39 on a haircut  
\$65 on salon color

Nearly two-thirds of women have taken steps to save money on their hair in the past 12 months.

- 1 in 3 extended time between salon visits
- 1 in 4 cut or trimmed their own hair
- 1 in 5 switched to a cheaper shampoo

## WE LIKE COLORING

53% regularly color their hair

29% have it done in a salon

26% do it themselves at home

**WE SPEND 15 minutes or less styling our hair (on average)**

**WE WASH IT 4 times a week (27% do it daily)**

**WE OWN 6 brushes & 7 products (on average)**

## And sometimes it really wrecks our day!

- 44% said they've been affected by a bad hair day
- 29% regretted a major style change
- 26% cried after a haircut
- 17% visited a salon to fix a cut or color mistake
- 12% drastically changed hair color after a life-altering event like a breakup or job loss

# the best *beauty deals*

Where to find rock-bottom prices on hair products

Buying shampoo, conditioner, hair spray, and other products to keep your locks looking lovely can really add up. To help you get the best deals, we sent 23 secret shoppers out to price nearly 50 of the top-selling shampoos, conditioners, and styling products (28 of them are listed here). The shoppers went to more than 100 drugstores plus Targets and Walmarts across the country. Then we checked

Drugstore.com to see whether you'll pay more or less online (the site offers free shipping if you spend more than \$25). As you'll see below, Target or Walmart won nearly every time—and in some cases cut your costs almost in half! The lowest prices are in red with a checkmark. Bolded prices are the lowest among drugstores. CVS and Rite Aid rarely had the best deals.



## shampoos

	CVS	RITE AID	WALGREENS	DRUGSTORE.COM	TARGET	WALMART
<b>CLAIROL HERBAL ESSENCES HELLO HYDRATION MOISTURIZING SHAMPOO</b> 23.7 oz.	\$8.01	\$7.79	\$7.21	<b>\$7.19</b>	\$4.99	<b>\$4.98 ✓</b>
<b>DOVE SHAMPOO</b> (any type) 25.4 oz.	8.04	8.04	n/a	<b>7.99</b>	<b>5.02 ✓</b>	5.18
<b>GARNIER FRUCTIS FORTIFYING SHAMPOO</b> (any type) 25.4 oz.	7.44	7.47	<b>6.90</b>	7.79	<b>4.98 ✓</b>	4.99
<b>PANTENE PRO-V SHAMPOO</b> (any type) 25.4 oz.	7.94	8.00	<b>7.49</b>	8.79	5.55	<b>5.45 ✓</b>
<b>SUAVE NATURALS SHAMPOO</b> (any type) 22.5 oz.	2.21	2.21	<b>2.03</b>	3.49	1.56	<b>1.46 ✓</b>
<b>TRESEMMÉ SHAMPOO</b> (any type) 32 oz.	5.41	5.51	5.08	<b>4.99</b>	4.21	<b>4.14 ✓</b>

## conditioners

	CVS	RITE AID	WALGREENS	DRUGSTORE.COM	TARGET	WALMART
<b>CLAIROL HERBAL ESSENCES HELLO HYDRATION MOISTURIZING CONDITIONER</b> 23.7 oz.	\$8.02	\$7.88	\$7.22	<b>\$7.19</b>	<b>\$5.07 ✓</b>	<b>\$5.07 ✓</b>
<b>DOVE CONDITIONER</b> (any type) 25.4 oz.	7.99	7.99	n/a	7.99	5.03	<b>4.96 ✓</b>
<b>GARNIER FRUCTIS FORTIFYING CREAM CONDITIONER</b> (any type) 25.4 oz.	7.44	7.47	<b>6.90</b>	7.79	<b>4.98 ✓</b>	5.00
<b>NEXXUS HUMECTRESS ULTIMATE MOISTURIZING CONDITIONER</b> 33.8 oz.	<b>27.56</b>	28.33	28.24	29.99	<b>23.46 ✓</b>	23.58
<b>PANTENE PRO-V CONDITIONER</b> (any type) 25.4 oz.	7.94	8.01	<b>7.47</b>	8.49	5.55	<b>5.45 ✓</b>
<b>SUAVE NATURALS CONDITIONER</b> (any type) 22.5 oz.	2.24	2.22	<b>2.03</b>	3.49	1.56	<b>1.45 ✓</b>
<b>TRESEMMÉ CONDITIONER</b> (any type) 32 oz.	5.47	5.51	<b>5.08</b>	5.89	4.21	<b>4.14 ✓</b>

## styling products

	CVS	RITE AID	WALGREENS	DRUGSTORE.COM	TARGET	WALMART
<b>AMERICAN CREW GEL</b> 8.45 oz.	\$14.24	\$13.75	\$15.69	<b>\$12.31</b>	\$13.67	<b>\$13.46 ✓</b>
<b>AQUANET HAIR SPRAY</b> 11 oz.	<b>2.97</b>	3.00	2.99	3.49	<b>1.95 ✓</b>	<b>1.95 ✓</b>
<b>CLAIROL HERBAL ESSENCES TOTALLY TWISTED GEL</b> 6 oz.	4.30	4.50	4.07	<b>3.99</b>	<b>2.98 ✓</b>	2.99
<b>CLAIROL HERBAL ESSENCES TOTALLY TWISTED MOUSSE</b> 6.8 oz.	4.38	4.50	<b>4.08</b>	4.19	<b>2.98 ✓</b>	3.00
<b>DOVE HAIR SPRAY</b> (any type) 7 oz.	5.04	4.78	4.69	<b>4.29</b>	3.05	<b>2.98 ✓</b>
<b>FRIZZ-EASE DREAM CURLS (SPRAY)</b> 6.7 oz.	6.92	6.49	7.06	<b>5.99</b>	<b>5.18 ✓</b>	5.49
<b>GARNIER FRUCTIS STYLE FULL CONTROL MOUSSE</b> 6.8 oz.	4.33	4.48	<b>4.07</b>	4.29	<b>3.38 ✓</b>	3.40
<b>LA LOOKS ABSOLUTE STYLING GEL</b> 20 oz.	4.00	3.67	<b>3.15</b>	3.49	1.96	<b>1.95 ✓</b>
<b>PANTENE PRO-V STYLE CURL, GEL</b> 6.8 oz.	4.81	4.97	4.79	<b>4.49</b>	<b>3.84 ✓</b>	<b>3.84 ✓</b>
<b>PANTENE PRO-V STYLE CURL, SPRAY MOUSSE</b> 6.6 oz.	4.80	4.96	4.79	<b>4.49</b>	<b>3.84 ✓</b>	<b>3.84 ✓</b>
<b>RAVE</b> 11 oz.	<b>3.02</b>	3.17	3.03	n/a	n/a	<b>1.98 ✓</b>
<b>SG SALON GRAFIX SHAPING HAIR SPRAY</b> 10 oz.	6.51	6.49	6.12	<b>5.99</b>	4.04	<b>3.99 ✓</b>
<b>SUAVE MAX HOLD HAIR SPRAY</b> 11 oz.	3.39	<b>2.99</b>	3.11	3.49	2.21	<b>2.04 ✓</b>
<b>TRESEMMÉ FLAWLESS CURLS MOUSSE</b> 10.5 oz.	5.02	4.99	4.57	<b>4.35</b>	<b>3.27 ✓</b>	3.35
<b>TRESEMMÉ TRES TWO HAIR SPRAY</b> 11 oz.	4.98	4.95	<b>4.53</b>	4.99	<b>3.17 ✓</b>	3.35

WENDELL WEBBER; PROP STYLING: LYNDA WHITE