

nailed it

Make your at-home paint job look and feel like you paid big money using essential pro tricks, TLC tips, spring's trendiest shades, and innovative formulas. Your lesson starts now.

1 FOLLOW YOUR SHAPE

Nail crazes come and go—remember the pointy almond? The squoval? Luckily, the one that's most flattering (and, quite frankly, the easiest) is also trending for spring. "I'm seeing more and more people embrace a short length that mirrors the natural curve of the nail bed," says Madeline Poole, nail artist and Sally Hansen Global Color Ambassador.

[TLC TIP] Trim your nails when they are dry and by making a few small clips in an arc shape (rather than straight across), then gently file with an emery board, Poole says.

2 DO THE PREP

To get tidy cuticles and a smooth, even surface—hallmarks of a salon mani—gently push back cuticles. This step creates more polish space and ensures you're painting on a flat surface. Then buff the nail plate with a buffing block to "get rid of the bumps you sometimes don't even see until you start painting the nail," Poole says. Finally, clean everything with soap, water, and a nail brush to whisk away any dust or debris.

[TLC TIP] Use an orange stick when working on your cuticles. "They're more gentle than using a metal cuticle pusher, which can scrape through the nail plate and leave debris," Poole says.

3 STICK TO THE SURFACE

Even if you don't have time for a full hand massage, a quick application of lotion will moisturize hands, nails, and cuticles, which is essential. But after you've treated yourself, remember to clean the nail with polish remover. "You want your nail plate to be clean of oils and creams to ensure the color adheres to the nail better," Poole says.

[TLC TIP] Swab your nails with a formula that won't leave them bone dry. Try Cutex Nourishing Nail Polish Remover, \$3; jet.com.

4 PICK A CARING COLOR

Not so long ago, your color choices were limited if you wanted a polish with fewer chemicals or needed to rehab weak, brittle nails. Now many enamels come three-free, five-free, even 13-free, which means they don't contain red flag ingredients like formaldehyde, toluene, and dibutyl phthalate. And new lines infuse color with ingredients to strengthen nails while staying on-trend.

[TLC TIP] Wait a couple of minutes after applying each coat. That way, Poole says, "the last coat will dry a lot quicker, so you're less likely to mess up your manicure."

5 HELP IT LAST

Once your polish is set, live your life, but be aware that extended water exposure or using your nails as tools contributes to chipping and shortens the lifespan of your manicure.

[TLC TIP] Apply cuticle oil twice daily to keep the enamel flexible and prevent chips.



GEL MANI REMOVAL

Salon gels last about two weeks without a chip, but they can leave the nail underneath thin and fragile if you peel or pick at them. "When polish is forced off, you take off layers of the nail plate, which weakens the nail," says Jane MacColla, founder of Hortus Nailworks in New York City. Soak nails in pure acetone for at least 15 minutes, until the gel lifts and you can flick it off.

EDITOR'S PICKS

TRENDING SHADES FOR SPRING

Sheer pinks, buffs, and beiges are timeless, but the shades that are going to set the season's style tone are cool mint greens and vibrant bright oranges.



REAL-LIFE ADVICE

DENISE PORCARO

The founder of Flower Girl NYC (flowergirlnyc.com) in Manhattan spends her days dunking her hands in buckets of water and arranging blooms for clients like Chanel, Marc Jacobs, and the Gap. However, her hands always look as polished as her clientele.

"I'm a hands person," she says. "I think they can tell such a nice story."

Her must-haves:

HAND CREAM

"I do my best to apply hand cream daily," Denise says. "My dermatologist specifically recommended Neutrogena Norwegian Formula to heal cracked skin." \$5; neutrogena.com

CUTICLE OIL

Along with regular salon manis, Denise relies on TenoverTen The Rose Oil (\$26; tenoverten.com) to keep her nails healthy. "I love the way it smells," she says. "And it's super easy to roll on your cuticles."

ACCESSORIES

The finishing touch to a perfect polish job is the stack of delicate rings decorating her fingers. Denise likes pieces from Finn, a fine jewelry line, and anything from Catbird, a hipster boutique in Brooklyn. "It's nice when you're working with your hands to make them look beautiful." ■



TOTAL TIME-SAVER

The formula incorporates base and top coats and dries in 60 seconds so you can be out the door in no time flat. Sally Hansen Insta-Dri in Thyme is Money, \$5; drugstores



SPECIAL EFFECT

This five-free polish contains micro-foil pigments to create a holographic finish. Revlon Nail Enamel Hologchrome Collection in Fairy Dust, \$6; walmart.com

SKIP A BASE COAT. YOU WANT THE INGREDIENTS TO TREAT YOUR NAILS.



SAGE CHOICE

Collagen and camellia leaf extract combine to take nails from brittle to strong in one week. Essie Treat Love & Color in Mint Condition, \$10; essie.com

THIS FORMULA COMES IN OVER 100 DIFFERENT SHADES.



ECO CHIC

Every polish in the Côte line is cruelty-free, vegan, and made without major toxins and allergens. Côte No. 50, \$18; coteshop.co



NAIL BREATHER

The formula is 13-free and nourishes with argan oil and vitamin B5. Bonus: halal certified. Orly Breathable in Vitamin Burst, \$9; orlybeauty.com



AT-HOME GEL

This is part of a three-step system that rivals the durability and chip-resistance of a gel manicure. OPI Infinite Shine in A Red-Vival City, \$13; ulta.com

PRO TIP "ONCE YOUR NAILS ARE DRY, RUN A POINTED EYELINER BRUSH DIPPED IN POLISH REMOVER AROUND THE CUTICLE TO ERASE ANY DRIPS." NAIL ARTIST MADELINE POOLE

PHOTOS: (POLISH) BLAINE MOATS, (PORTRAIT) ERIC RYAN ANDERSON