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FACE SCRUBS

They're virtually synonymous with exfoliation, the sloughing off of dead cells to cleanse the skin and reveal a new layer. Scrubs prevent clogged pores and improve skin tone, so they're well suited for oily, splotchy, and combination skin. But they're not appropriate for acneic skin or for use during breakouts—the friction can irritate pimples and make them cystic (containing sebum that's trapped under the skin). For the same reason, those with sensitive or rosacea-prone skin should eschew scrubs.

The kibbles and bits in scrubs vary widely. They include crushed apricot pits and walnuts, found largely in drugstore brands; diatomaceous earth, a superfine mineral, used in Astar's Daily Refining Scrub (\$30, www.astaraskincare.com); and lab-created microbeads and microspheres, found in Dove Daily Exfoliating Cleanser (\$4.69, www.dove.com) and Sisley's Gel Nettoyant Gommant (\$75, www.saks.com).

With scrubs, natural is not necessarily better. The advantage of synthetic particles, which are typically made of polyethylene, a plastic derivative, is their perfectly spherical shape. "You don't want to rough up the skin you intended to smooth," says Robert Manzo, the cosmetic-chemist founder of the Skinprint skin-care company. "And unrefined edges from fruit pits and nutshells microabrade the skin." The lesson: The smoother the particle, the smoother the scrubbed skin.



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