

# Everything You've Ever Needed to Know About Gels

Top experts answer  
your most pressing questions  
about the hottest trend in nails.

By Anita Lime-Sims

**A**s a 21-year nail veteran in the United States, I have seen shows, classes and competitions for gels come and go—and then come back around again. The first light-cured UV coating for fingernails was developed by Jim Guiliano in Sunrise, Florida, recalls Betsy Ayotte from Nailite, Inc. He worked with artificial prostheses, particularly eyeballs, and used a UV treatment to finish each eyeball with a shiny coating. Guiliano actually got this idea from his wife, a manicurist, and he started a company called Nails By Lamplight. It was the first gel for nails on the market. “He used a huge, hot, halogen-type light bulb that was encased in a black wooden box,” says Ayotte. “A real antique. If you saw one now, you wouldn’t believe it. His gel was also a three-step gel, and was, to us in the business, very expensive.”

In those early days, gel manufacturers did not have the technology, industry presence or education that they enjoy today, and they had many problems ironing out a viable procedure. Techs were taught a specific method—two thin coats, and no buffing—and after those steps, the client was on her way. Whether you were a newbie or a veteran, this procedure sounded great, but was, unfortunately, based on misconceptions; gel application didn't quite work that way. Eventually, the unused product and expensive gel light went into the closet.

After some time had passed, gels made a second debut. The trend spread more slowly the second time around, but quickly gained momentum and has now busted wide open. "It took a long, long time for gels to pick up and become as popular as they are now," recalls Ayotte. "Guiliano came into our shop (as we were in his neighborhood) and we learned about his product, and decided we could improve it! One of my best friends was

a chemist who worked in a lab in Connecticut, specializing in UV coatings for printed circuit boards. Through that connection, Nailite came out with the second UV gel, and it was also the first one-step gel in the industry," says Ayotte.

Now everyone wants to get in on the hottest nail technique in the industry today. New gel manufacturers are sprouting up, veteran manufacturers are getting on board and techs are clamoring to offer these services. You can now be as creative as you want by offering glitter and color gel enhancements, and this time, manufacturers are offering plenty of education to back up the products. "Gels are strong, flexible and durable, and have no odor," says Gina Silvestro, co-owner of Gel Essentialz in Cranston, Rhode Island. "They're also nonyellowing and lightweight, have a natural feel and come premixed so you don't need to worry about the proper mix ratio." So listen up, techs. Gels are here to stay!

# Individual Gels and Top Coats



The transparent clarity of **YOU Switzerland VIP Gel Aqua** by Backscratchers Salon System ensures clients a wet look on gel enhancements and natural-nail overlays for weeks. Tested in salons and perfected in Europe, the gel cures in 90 seconds for durable nails. **800/832-5577, www.backscratchers.com.**



Gloss up clients' nails with **Super Shiny** from Light Elegance. The gel goes on like nail polish, and after curing under a UV lamp, provides intense gloss for up to four weeks. **800/275-5596, www.lightelegance.com.**

There's no primer or bonder needed with Christrio **Basic One UV Clear Gel**. This one-phase gel system self-levels, features a UV inhibitor to prevent yellowing, and with the Basic One UV light, cures in three minutes. **800/574-4252, www.christrio.com.**



**Original Gel** from Nailite was one of the first gels in the nailcare industry and is still going strong today! Just as it was originally created, the gel is a one-step product that requires no additional wipes or primers and cures with a fluorescent light for long-lasting durability. **800/222-4472, www.nailiteinc.com.**



You can skip the cleansing step with **Precision UV Dry Top Seal** from Lagoon Beauty Products. Simply file the gel nail, remove the dust, apply a thin coat and cure for three minutes to leave clients with a glossy finish that'll protect their new enhancements. **866/LAMOON-1, www.lagoonbeauty.com.**



Just brush on gel and go with **1-Step Gel** from Gelousy Gel Nail Systems. With a curing time of two minutes, it's possible to create a full set of gel nails in 30 minutes and complete a fill in 15. The gel also works with Gelousy's 48 color gels. **877/363-0201, www.gelousy.com.**

# Basic Kits



Angel Love Nail Supplies has everything you need to make the transition to gels in its **Conversion Kit**. Among the bounty of products included are two UV lamps and guards, brushes, a file saver exclusive to Angel Love, 12 gel colors including a glow-in-the-dark shade, and an instructional DVD. **866/850-7280, www.alnails.com.**

**Brisa Sculpting Kit**, the gel system from Creative Nail Design, is the world's first covalently bonding and hypoallergenic gel nail enhancement product. The gels in the system are easy to work with and either create thin, light and natural-looking gel enhancements, or provide natural-nail clients with high-shine manicures that last up to three weeks. **800/833-NAIL, www.creativenaildesign.com.**



It only takes 10 minutes to remove gels with ibd **Soak Off Gel** and **Soak Off Remover**. The clear gel cures in three minutes for long-lasting shine and can be taken off with the Remover with little to no effort. Using the products in concert makes changing gels a breeze! **323/728-2999, www.ibdbeauty.com.**

Intimidated by gels? Fear not! The **S-Gel System** from Kupa Inc. was designed to help skittish techs transition from pink-and-white acrylics to gels. The system includes GelStructure, GelSmile

and GelShine, all of which come in polish-style bottles for easy, clean application. The kit also comes with a dehydrator, equalizer, primer and cuticle oil. **800/994-5872, www.kupainc.com.**



Lamoon Beauty Products aims to cut down the time techs spend on gels with its **Precision Crystal UV Gel & Powder Mixture System**.

This system reduces the need for filing and buffing while cutting down on dust and fumes, and, of course, creating exquisite gel nails! **866/LAMOON-1, www.lamoonbeauty.com.**



You can easily soak off gels created with Le Chat R&D **Nobility Competition Gel**. Each Nobility kit contains Cleanser to remove gel residue and eliminate moisture on the nail bed; PrimeBond to promote nail adhesion; Clear Gel for quick and easy gel applications; and Remover to take off the Clear Gel while maintaining moisture levels in the surrounding skin. **800/553-2428, www.lechatnails.com.**

Make the jump to gels easier with the **Lightbox Basic Gel System** from the Nailco Group. The kit contains a 6-watt UV light; Fusion Gel, which preps nails and tips; clear Sculpting Gel; Cleanse Away, which cleans the nail prior to gel application; and a #6 Lucite Brush. **800/362-6245, www.theindustrysource.com.**



NSI has released two new kits for its Balance UV Gel System. The **Balance Overlay Kit** is ideal for natural-nail clients, it contains Brush On French White Gels and everything you need to create overlays for natural nails or tips. And **Balance Sculpting Kit** features

Radiant White Sculptor Gel, Balance UV Gel Forms and everything else required for creating pink-and-white gel enhancements. **800/354-6741, www.nsinails.com.**

The Young Nails **Synergy Gel System** includes a total of nine gels—Base, Flex, Build, Build Pink, Snow, French, Hyper White, Gloss and Finish—to create a state-of-the-art set of gel enhancements; the gels' chain entanglement technology ensures superior adhesion and strength. **800/777-9170, www.youngnails.com.**



# Color Gels



There are 13 colors available in the line of **YOU Designer Gels** by Backscratcher Salon Systems, including red, violet and moon dust glitter. The shades come in a medium to thick viscosity formula for vivid gel nails with color that lasts. **800/832-5577, [www.backscratchers.com](http://www.backscratchers.com).**

Go to the gel side with your nail art by using **Xpress Gels** from Christrio; the applicator-outfitted bottles and 30-second curing time make detail work a breeze. The durable gels come in 13 colors with more on the way. **800/574-4252, [www.christrio.com](http://www.christrio.com).**



Give clients the polish colors they want in gel form with **Soak Off Gel Polishes** by ibd. Included in the first set of 12 radiant colors are pink Intoxicating, intense red Passion and near-black Midnight Rendezvous. All they require is a thin layer of clear Soak Off Gel before application on natural nails or enhancements. **323/728-2999, [www.ibdbeauty.com](http://www.ibdbeauty.com).**

The new **Glaze Gels** from LCN are thicker than LCN's Sealant and come in a range of colors honoring the traditional bridal season. The Elegant Line is ideal for a neutral look with gels in Natural Beige, Soft Rose and Soft Apricot, while the French Top collection consists of three white gels with glitter in Noble Sparks, Silver and Gold. (The Aqua, Blue, Purple and Volcanic Fire shimmer shades in the Noble Shine collection might be better suited for the honeymoon.) **800/86-NAILS, [www.lcnusa.com](http://www.lcnusa.com).**



Fashion plates will love the color selection in the **T3 European Colour Gels** collection from Star Nail. New long-lasting color options include Invitation Only Red, Fashionista Fuchsia, Portfolio Plum and Catwalk Pink, which come in a consistency appropriate for full-out enhancements, or just for having fun with nail art. **800/762-6245, [www.starnail.com](http://www.starnail.com).**

Let your imagination run wild; the **Kaleidoscope Gel Kit** from Young Nails lets you channel your creativity onto your clients' nails. The kit includes nine colors, including shading, tinting and glitter additives, and all the mixing tools and dishes you need to fashion fun, beautiful gel nails. **800/777-9170, [www.youngnails.com](http://www.youngnails.com).**



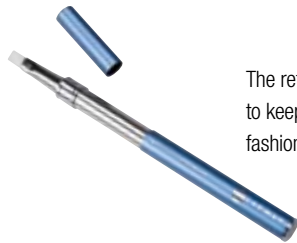
# Accessories



Thoroughly cure your clients' gels with the **Brisa UV Lamp** from Creative Nail Design. Intended for use with Brisa gel enhancements, the lamp's three high-efficiency, 9-watt bulbs infuse gels with maximum strength and durability, and the ergonomic design ensures a comfortable experience. The lightweight lamp easily fits on most nail stations. **800/833-NAIL, [www.creativenaildesign.com](http://www.creativenaildesign.com).**

LCN offers two brushes to make gel application a snap. The **Mobile Brush** has a cover that makes for easy hygienic application; when the cover is removed and attached to the end, the handle is full-length. The brush features mahogany-colored synthetic hair and comes in pointed or flat tip shapes. The **French Line Brush** has a wood handle with synthetic hair, and the slightly slanted edge of the brush makes for a steady French line.

**800/86-NAILS, [www.lcnusa.com](http://www.lcnusa.com).**



The retractable **Gel Brush** from Le Chat R&D comes in a #4 size and is easy to keep clean and safe from damage. Plus, the brush's sleek design makes it a fashionable addition to any nail table. **800/553-2428, [www.lechatnails.com](http://www.lechatnails.com).**

You'll never forget to change the bulbs in your **Easy Cure Lamp** from Light Elegance; an LED display on the back of the unit will remind you when it's time. In addition, the lamp will automatically shut down when left idle for two minutes—ensuring that those bulbs will last even longer! **800/275-5596, [www.lightelegance.com](http://www.lightelegance.com).**



The **UV Light 9W** from Nailite is designed to easily cure gels on both fingers and toes: The lamp can be easily placed on the floor for maximum foot comfort, and the reflective interior makes for thorough curing. **800/222-4472, [www.nailiteinc.com](http://www.nailiteinc.com).**

Speed up the gel-curing process with the Star Nail **Professional Multi-System UV Light**. The lamp has been updated with a 9-watt bulb (30 percent stronger than the previous light) and features a full reflector system inside to intensify the curing. Light-cured acrylics and regular top coats can be cured with this lamp as well. **800/762-6245, [www.starnail.com](http://www.starnail.com).**



### **What should I look for when choosing a gel system?**

First, decide what you want to do with the product. Here are some options:

if you're a gel newbie, you may want to start with a one-step system until you get the feel of the product and then graduate to a multistep system.

- Build nails (as an alternative to acrylics or wraps)
- Create natural-nail overlays, tips or sculptures
- Use gel as a top coat to add a fabulous shine over wraps and acrylics
- Apply gel polishes to prevent smudges and quicken drying time with a UV cure
- Enhance your creativity by using gels artistically, such as with glitters or to embed 3-D pieces

Whatever your goals, always look for quality and strength when choosing a gel product. Amy Becker, founder of Masterworks Innovations in Nails in Mequon, Wisconsin, says, "Selecting a gel system can be trial and error. Most companies will supply you with samples." After properly applying the product, note chipping, lifting, immediate heat spiking and shine.

### **Should I choose a one-step or multistep system?**

Determine the system type based on your personal preference. However, if you're a gel newbie, you may want to start with a one-step system until you get the feel of the product and then graduate to a multistep system. You may then choose to use both, alternating systems depending on the situation. Some manufacturers offer one type of system, while others offer both.

A **one-step system** indicates that one gel does everything; it can be used for the

base and building. A **multistep system** indicates that you'll use different gels for each step while creating the nail—base, builder and sculpting gels.

Nearly all gels require you to apply a cleanser (dehydrator) and a bonder (primer) before application. In addition, you can use a top gloss (sealant) for a permanent, supershiny finish.

### **What is the difference between soakable and nonsoakable gels?**

Soakable (soft) gels are porous and can be soaked off with acetone. These gels are usually weaker, but they're more flexible than nonsoakable gels. They are great for providing permanent color and a little added strength. These are usually one-step gels, but not always.

Nonsoakable (hard) gels are nonporous and are not affected by acetone or polish removers. These must be filed and buffed for removal. They are very strong and are available in both one-step and multistep systems.

Advantages and disadvantages exist for both types of systems. You may want to purchase both options, using whichever type suits an individual client's needs.



### **What is the difference between gels in a polish bottle and gels in a pot?**

Besides top-coat gels, gels in a bottle with a brush applicator feature a viscosity that can tackle many tasks.

Le Chat R&D educator Yvette Holt from Focus Hair and Nails in Reno, Nevada, uses bottled gel with a powder overlay. Instead of building the strength with layers of gel and concentrating on the apex (the high point of the nail), she builds the apex with powder and gel; the building process takes 10 seconds.

You can try many brands of brush-on gels; check out the product guide starting on page 68 for some ideas. I actually started out using the brush-on method and have recently taken it up again—it's definitely worth checking out.

To find out about potted gels that require a separate brush, I again turned to gel nail guru Amy Becker, as well as 15-year gel user Chelly Eric from Salon Nirvana in Winthrop Harbor, Illinois. Both techs use the potted gels because they used to be avid acrylic sculptors and feel that these types of gels allow for more control of the product.

There is an art to this type of application; you'll need to fine-tune your brush and gel handling and build the nail with proper structure. Vicki Peters, vice president of Kupa/Vicki Peters Signature Series, suggests, "Always build the nail with a proper structure. Check the nails five ways, making a 3-D nail. The apex should be the high point of the nail. This gives it strength."

Some techs feel that potted gels allow for more control of the product.

Depending on the expertise and creativity of the tech, the control of the product and possible application techniques can surpass using gel in a polish bottle.

Manufacturers, always looking to improve upon the products out there, are introducing new types of gel applications, such as those with a tube applicator and squeeze-on methods.

### **What kind of brush should I use?**

Most manufacturers provide a brush or suggest one for use with their products; almost all are synthetic. Becker and Eric use sable brushes, which I found an interesting concept, so I decided to try it. After using a flat brush for clear gel and a separate brush for color, I realized that I love it!

### **Should I buy a system that has color options to create pink-and-whites? Can I use one system for colors and another for pink-and-whites?**

All gel systems include products to create pink-and-whites; however, not all systems provide color gels yet. Color gels are a relatively new innovation and some manufacturers are currently working on creating these formulas. Color and pink-and-white gels are also great to use on top of other types of enhancements. I started using color gels last year, and they're a huge hit. You may opt to use two or more systems to provide the most options for your clients—as long as you have the appropriate wattage in your gel lamp to cure the products you use and cure for the appropriate length of time for each particular gel.

### **Are there gels that don't need to be cured under a UV light?**

Not really. Most likely, these products are thick adhesives with a catalyst. The adhesive can have a gel-like viscosity, and you should use a catalyst, not a UV light, to cure the product.

### **What factors should I consider when choosing a UV light?**

Consider the following when purchasing your gel lamp:

- Budget—lamps range from \$60 to more than \$200
- Bulbs with appropriate wattage to cure the product(s) you use
- Available table space
- Hand capacity—a lamp can accommodate one or two hands; you'll usually work on one hand while the other is curing, but you may work quickly enough for a two-hand lamp
- Roominess—look for a lamp in which the whole hand can fit under the light so you don't have to cure the thumbs separately
- Timer—look for one that comes with a timer or else you'll

need to measure the time by using a separate timer.

- Ease of replacement parts and availability of bulbs
- Ease of cleanup

You can find plenty of information on bulbs, wattage and the performance of gel lamps online. Check there to find resources on these topics.

### **Where can I get more information on gels?**

Trade shows are great places to start gathering information. Prepare yourself with some questions, visit the booths and let a tech at each booth apply a nail for you. Ask for free samples. Each product line is different, so note the proper techniques and pick up instructions for each.

When you purchase a kit, almost every company will provide how-to videos, DVDs and classes, either free of charge or for a nominal fee. Almost all manufacturers also provide information on the Internet. To find a list of gel-related classes and upcoming trade shows, check the Happenings section of *Nailpro* (either in the magazine or online at [www.nailpro.com](http://www.nailpro.com)). You can also browse nail tech and manufacturer websites.

Trade shows are great places to start gathering information. Prepare yourself with some questions, visit the booths and let a tech at each booth apply a nail for you.

Remember, information on gels is readily available, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Let this article be a stepping stone to venturing out into the exciting world of gels; you'll love exploring this new frontier! ↓

---

Anita Lime-Sims, known as "the fiber queen" for her mastery of fiberglass nail enhancements, is a 21-year industry veteran, competition champion and *Nailpro* competition judge.