

Nail It!

Five manicure options for perfectly polished looks

BY NICOLE MCDERMOTT

No matter what you're wearing — or the state of your hair and makeup — a great manicure can help you feel polished around the clock. Whether you opt for a barely there nude, a bold pop of color or a statement-making design, manicured nails can help you feel put together for any occasion.

To help you nail down the look that best suits your style and your pocket-book, Elle Gerstein, a New York-based celebrity nail technician, breaks down the most common manicure options:



It's a wrap!

Applying gel nail polish strips is a simple DIY way to achieve professional results.



BASIC MANICURE

Cost: \$10 to \$40

A basic manicure is one of the most cost-effective choices whether you do it at home or a salon. It involves cleaning, buffing, trimming and shaping nails, followed by cuticle removal. A base coat, nail polish and topcoat are optional. Gerstein says you could drop upward of \$75 on a bottle of designer nail polish, so the cost can certainly vary and so can the quality of your manicure.

“Walking into a corner salon, it’s a gamble and you do not know what you’re going to get,” she says. Gerstein advises checking out the artist’s website and Instagram to see if you like their aesthetic, and then try to find out how many years they’ve been in the industry.



GEL MANICURE

Cost: \$20 to \$65

For a longer-lasting manicure (up to three weeks versus about one), you may want to choose gel. Ultraviolet light cures (or hardens) the gel polish, which makes it extra durable. Pro tip: To protect your hands from minor skin damage caused by using a UV lamp, apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen before drying.

Gerstein cautions against going the DIY route with gel nails since the removal process can be damaging if done incorrectly. This is especially true for hard gel nails, which need to be removed with a file and the skilled hand of a nail technician. Soft gel, in contrast, can be removed by soaking in nail polish remover.



ACRYLIC MANICURE

Cost: \$25 to \$100

This type of manicure, which involves mixing a liquid (monomer) and a powder (polymer) together to cure before applying to the nail to be shaped and polished, has made a big comeback recently, Gerstein says.

Acrylics are more durable than gel and allow you to add sizable length. While a set of acrylics can last six to eight weeks, you’ll typically need to see a nail tech every two to three weeks to fill in the gap between your cuticle and the acrylics as your natural nails grow. And because acrylics adhere so well, they can be harsh on your nails if they aren’t removed properly. “If there’s breakage, you’re going to have damage,” Gerstein says.



GEL WRAP MANICURE

Cost: \$7 to \$25

Gel wraps are dried strips of gel nail polish you simply peel and apply. After you place the nail-shaped stickers, you can add a top coat so your mani lasts for a week or longer. While the intricate designs — from florals and abstract prints to sets embellished with gems and gold foil — add a distinct touch to the at-home manicure, you can also purchase wraps in solid colors.

Once you apply gel wraps, you can use nail scissors or clippers to remove the excess, then file them to fit your nails.

This nail trend offers the aesthetic appeal of the detailed artwork only a seasoned nail tech can achieve by hand — but without the hefty price tag or time commitment.

PRESS-ON MANICURE

Cost: \$6 to \$100 or more for custom sets (Note: Some press-ons are reusable.)

As the name implies, press-ons are bare or pre-painted tips (aka artificial nails) that you adhere to your own nail with adhesive by applying pressure.

When carefully sized and applied well, press-ons can help you achieve a professional-looking manicure in minutes. They’re a great way to add length and try out a trending shape — such as almond or coffin.

Gerstein says press-ons are a great option for special events because they add glamour, but they don’t offer the longevity of other types of manicures. “They’re not meant to go weeks,” she says.

For extra durability, Gerstein recommends adding a generous drop of glue to the press-on and just a little glue directly to your nail so you can create a better bond when you press the tip down. Then, she says, apply the press-on onto your nail at a 45-degree angle to disperse the glue and prevent air bubbles from forming.

