

Gone Virile

» There's no end to the beard trend, but what to do if your facial growth is more girly fluff than grizzly fur? **Maxim Boon** uncovers the secrets of the scruff.

BEARDS ARE SEXY. There is no denying it, and this isn't just my opinion, it's practically a statement of fact: the sky is blue and beards are sexy. Beards are having a moment – and it's a moment that's showing little sign of slowing. From the shores of Sydney to the streets of New York, beards are sprouting up in recognition that few male mugs aren't radically improved by a rugged faceful of fuzz.

Whereas once upon a time beards were reserved for vegans, Father Christmas and Jesus, now they are the must-have accessory for any face wanting to impress. They've been elevated from a mere grooming choice to cult status, becoming an essential badge of honour for any bear, otter, hipster or lumbersexual worth their salt, and the more monumental you can make your facial-furnishings the better. Designer stubble and delicately groomed George Michael goatees are out; sporting a spade-like thicket of bristles that would make a Spartan proud is in.

Beard trends have come and gone over the

centuries, but whatever the era, its popularity has always gone hand-in-hand with an expression of raw masculinity: a symbol of strength, virility and sexual potency. In short, anyone sporting a beard is someone ready, willing and able to do manly things. However, while the bearded masses may be celebrating (probably by treating themselves to a fancy new moustache wax), there remain those of us who aren't so cheery about the situation. I'm referring to the follicle-challenged, reluctantly smooth-cheeked; those who suffer from what I like to call "terminal boy-face" – a chronic inability to grow a decent amount of facial hair. For the unlucky ones only able to muster a patchy sprouting of fair, downy fluff with the consistency of fairy floss, attempts to grow a passable beard usually end in disappointment and frustration.

Inside every clean-shaven man is a beard screaming to be set free, so what's a guy to do when his stubble just won't cooperate? Time

to get some expert advice. If there's one thing that master barber and Brand Manager of Soho House's trendy Neville range, Tom Ewan Harrigan knows, it's beards. Not only has he twice won L'Oreal Men's Stylist Of The Year, he's also had a beard "for as long as I could grow one," which, for Harrigan, was from the age of 15.

While genetics play a huge role in the quality and quantity of facial hair one is able to grow, "There are some strategies that may improve your odds even if your DNA says no," Harrigan shares. "When trying to cultivate a beard, your best allies are time and patience." As popularity in beards has escalated, Harrigan has counselled countless clients hoping to boost their beard growing potential, and his top tip is always the same: "You have to be prepared to look scruffy for a while, as it can take up to six months or more for a beard to look its best."

Committing to a beard can be one of the major hurdles, but with time even patchy growth can be improved. "Sparse areas will

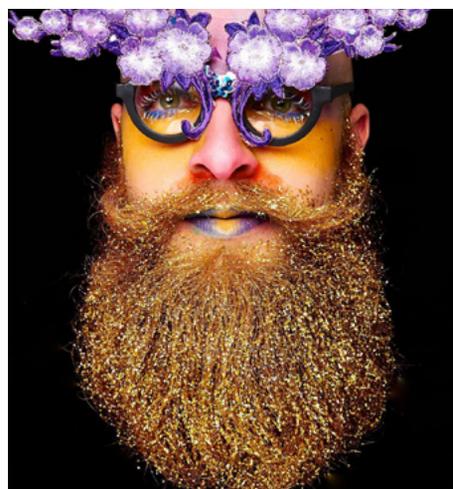
eventually fill out or be covered by longer hair, but good grooming is essential. Having a beautiful beard takes work.”

A good ol’ fashioned pair of quality scissors is Harrigan’s weapon of choice when trimming. “Clippers are too aggressive and can undo all your good work,” he advises. “They should only ever be used to clean your neckline.” Facial hair needs love, too, and showing your follicles some TLC with regular conditioning and moisturising is another of Harrigan’s essential tips. There are hundreds of beard oils, shampoos and other grooming products on the market, but an argan oil-based product is best for lustrous results.

Aside from letting nature take its course, is there a way to get your face from Macaulay Culkin to Tom Selleck, twink to trucker, beardless to beard-yes... in double-quick time? As grandma always used to say, “Eat your crusts, it’ll put hairs on your chest.” Is this old wives tale so far from the truth? Can you eat your way to a better beard? While there’s little scientific proof that dietary factors play any significant role in improving hair growth, a range of supplements specifically designed to provide your face with beard-boosting nutrients have been gaining popularity. One of the first to jump on this opportunity was US-based boutique supplement company Do Vitamins, whose VitaBeard multivitamin promises to provide “the perfect fertiliser to help grow the best beard you can”. The specially crafted nutritional profile features a treasure trove of bearded goodness, backed up with some compelling nutritional science,

years. According to Martinick, clients range from men who naturally have sparse facial hair, to men who have previously had their beards lasered off but now want their follicles back; even transsexual men for whom hormone therapy hasn’t delivered sufficient beard growth.

For those opting for a beard transplant, a quick lunchtime botoxing, it ain’t. It is a six-hour operation involving up to 12 medical staff who painstakingly implant as many as 2,500 individual “follicular units” in just the right natural spiral for the hair growth to appear authentic, and as much as three weeks of rehabilitation is needed. Unsurprisingly this highly-specialised and substantial procedure comes with an equally substantial price tag of up to \$15,000. Those deciding to cut corners



by going for a budget transplant run the risk of ending up with a Frankenbeard that looks more like a bog-brush than a Spartan warrior.

“It’s vital to use an experienced surgeon who understands the details of artistry required to produce a cosmetically superior and natural-looking outcome,” Dr Martinick warns.

Before you go spending big bucks on a beautiful new beard, the lowly clean-shaven face might just be in for a comeback. Research is showing that as the beard becomes more commonplace, it’s perceived sexual attractiveness decreases in a phenomenon known as “negative frequency-dependent sexual selection”. As we fast approach “peak beard”, the baby-faced underdogs might finally have the genetic upper hand. Lather up, boys!

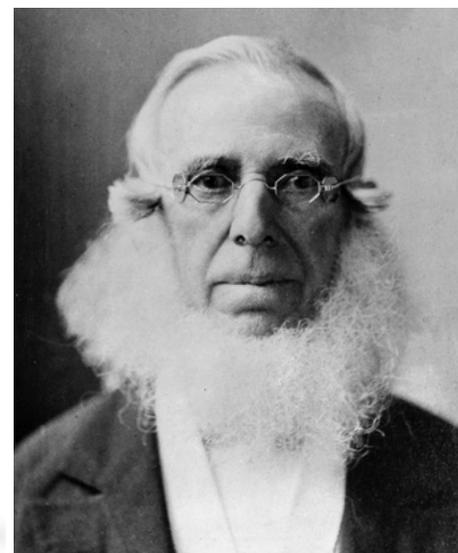


Aside from letting nature take its course, is there a way to get your face from Macaulay Culkin to Tom Selleck, twink to trucker, beardless to beard-yes... ?

and at less than \$30 for a month’s supply, it’s no wonder that international demand for this product has skyrocketed.

However, online reviews for this and similar supplements are mixed, with some men reporting noticeable improvements almost overnight, while others have been left disappointed after months of use with little or nothing to show for it. There remains a sure-fire option, one that almost guarantees delivery of dramatic and lasting results: a beard transplant.

It may sound extreme, but for those willing to splash some cash, cosmetic surgery can bypass the genetic hurdles to beardsville. Dr Jennifer Martinick, Medical Director of Australia’s biggest chain of hair-loss clinics, Martinick Hair Restoration, has seen a huge surge in the volume of clients requesting the procedure, with numbers more than doubling in the past two



Clockwise from top-left: Sparkle that scruff with a hefty application of glitter (as seen on Sydney nightlife sensation, Matt Format). Accessorise your undergrowth with a floral arrangement or... Is your manly monument out of control like inventor, industrialist and 1876 US presidential candidate, Peter Cooper? You’re never too busy to trim and nourish. Vitabeard promises the “perfect fertiliser” for beard growth. An argan oil beard moisturiser offers the most lustrous results.