

# North Island Rhododendron Society



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PO Box 3183, Courtenay, BC, Canada V9N 5N4

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Contributors: Mary Palmer Rose-Marie Silkens

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### Rhodo Garden

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### Historian

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### Sunshine Lady

Gwen Wright .....338-8345

### Revenue Table

Gloria Guyader .....338-5267

### Publicity

Evelyn Wright.....339-7493

### Newsletter

Noni Godfrey .....335-0717

## COMING EVENTS:

### 6 September

Executive meeting will be held at the home of Paul Wurz, 4367 Gordon Rd., Campbell River. Drive north past the pulp mill, turn onto Duncan Bay Rd., then to Gordon Rd. Paul's home and Hidden Acres nursery is just past the Mystic Woods Nursery. Watch for signs.

## 13 September — Regular Monthly Meeting

**Guest Speaker:** Christine North on "Growing Rhododendrons in the English Manner."

### Topics will include:

- A very brief history on the arrival of rhododendrons in England.
- Growing rhododendrons in the English style.
- Companion and underplanting of rhododendrons.
- The dreaded ponticum.

### Biography:

Christine has been commissioned to write an article for "Homes and Gardens" and has been featured in The Sunday Telegraph, Woman's Journal, Home Run, and others. Christine has participated in the "Woman's Hour" programme on Radio 4 and has taken part in a garden program for BBC Southern Radio, based on Gay Search's "Gardening from Scratch".

Christine has taught Topiary, Garden Design and other related courses at the English Gardening School at the Chelsea Physic Garden, Marlborough College Summer School and West Dean College, in England. This year she commences lecturing at Malaspina University College in Nanaimo and other venues in Canada.

## MEMBER NOTES:

### POT LUCK WRAP-UP PARTY

(by Dave Godfrey)



On Saturday, June 18<sup>th</sup>, the weather eased off in time for the annual potluck wrap-up dinner held at Bernice and Gerry Morrison's garden, in Comox.

There were 39 in attendance, including 8 executive members of the MARS chapter. As mentioned by MC Diana Scott, MARS originated as an offspring chapter from the NIRS in 1989. So it was especially fitting that they were invited to attend the evening's event.

Following a tour of Harry and Gwen Wright's gardens by the MARS members, everyone gathered at the Morrison's around 4 pm. By 4:30, most had decided to participate in the "bean bag toss" tournament organized by Dave and Noni Godfrey, with scorekeeping by Tansy Pauls.



Our hostess, Bernice Morrison, surprised us with some musical entertainment for the event. Bean Bag competition was suspended about 5:30 for a special performance by The Sweet Adeline's, 'A Cappella'. All members thoroughly enjoyed the 20 minute performance.

Following the musical entertainment, a terrific buffet dinner was served. The members provided a wonderful selection of dishes, with desserts provided by the MARS members

At the conclusion of the dinner, play resumed in the tournament. Competition was fierce, and grew stronger as the teams progressed towards the playoff rounds.

In the semi-finals, Gwen Wright teamed up with MARS member Vic Vickers to face the MARS team of Ron McMaster and Marilyn Dawson. By a score of 5 to 1, Gwen and Vic easily defeated Ron and Marilyn, to take third place.

In the finals, it was Dave Crucq and Noni Godfrey representing NIRS vs. Art and Susan Lightburn of MARS. Exciting play entertained both the players and the spectators, and in the end, it was the NIRS team that took the top prize.

Consolation prizes were awarded to Marilyn Dawson for the "highest toss" (it almost stayed in the tree!); "Wildest toss" award went to Gwen Wright (thankfully she wasn't throwing lawn darts!); "Shortest toss" went to Nancy Vickers (you have to let go of the bag, Nancy!); "Longest toss" went to Jim Clyde (a big man with a powerful throw!); Not to be out done, "Best form" was presented to Lois Clyde (not bad from a "down under"!);

And finally, the "Worst form" and most comical performance went to our "hostess with the mostest", Bernice Morrison.

The event was so entertaining that the MARS group asked to borrow the game for their wrap-up pot luck dinner the following Saturday. It was agreed that they could, provided they didn't practice up during the week.

Executive members of NIRS were return invited to the MARS Pot Luck at the home of Ron and Judy McMaster in Parksville, on 25<sup>th</sup> June. It was overheard at our dinner that we are a tough act to follow, but they came close.



Bernie and Gloria Guyader show off their 1<sup>st</sup> place prizes

## 2005 ANNUAL ARS CONVENTION

(by Diana Scott.)

The North Island Rhododendron Society was well represented at the 60th Annual ARS Convention in Victoria this past spring! Seen enjoying the various lectures, garden tours, and events were Paul Wurz, Harry and Gwen Wright, Dave and Marlene Crucq, Rob Argall, Len and Madeleine Simmons, Brian Staton, Judy Walker, Diana Scott, as well as Rudy and Renate Tschach. The organizers of the Convention put together a terrific program and are to be commended for arranging a very enjoyable conference!

As part of the Opening Ceremonies and welcome, the Hon. Iona Campagnolo shared her experiences with gardening throughout her life. These include her passion for the gardens at Government House, where she works with the many dedicated volunteers who tend those beautiful gardens. Well spoken and entertaining, it was a pleasure to hear how much she enjoys getting her hands in the earth just like the rest of us!

Following the Lieutenant Governor's speech and then each morning of the Convention, lectures were presented by outstanding speakers from Australia, New Zealand, Sikkim, Scotland, the US and BC. As a relative newcomer to Rhodos, many of the names were unfamiliar to me, but quite well known to those 'in the know'!

Quentin Cronk, John Hammond, Ben Hall, Peter Wharton, Joy Stones and Ted Cutlan, Keshab Pradhan, Erik Allen, Lynn Bublitz, Richard Hebda, Edward Irving, and our own Judith Walker presented various topics throughout the conference. The slide shows were excellent, and several of the sessions were delightful armchair 'rhodo vacations'.

Two presentations that made a big impression on me were both excellent and informative, although quite different in their content. The first was by Eric Allen, who is a research scientist and head of the Forest Health and Biodiversity group at the Pacific Forestry Centre. He has worked extensively on non-indigenous species and their impact on forest ecosystems. He is chair of BC Plant Protection Advisory Council and deputy coordinator working on 'Alien Invasive Species in International Trade'.

Mr. Allen's topic was "Terrorism in the Plant World", and I now have a better sense of the phrase - 'Be afraid; be very afraid!' With clarity and in simple language, he gave an overview of the ecological and financial impact that foreign insects, plant and animal life have on our resource industries, communities and home gardens.

One area that caught my attention was the work being done to keep *Phytophthora ramorum*, or Sudden Oak Death, from entering Canada. Good thing, too, as Rhodos and Azaleas have a 90% mortality rate, and the

list of other plants affected by it is quite extensive. It could, in effect, wipe out much of my garden! Bravo to the folks at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency who are working hard to reduce our risk!

The second presentation was by Judith Walker, a registered landscape architect practicing on Vancouver Island, and a founding member of our NIRS. As stated in the Convention program, Judy's topic "Making Connections: From a Continent to an Island" presented the 'fascinating story of friendships and chance encounters, trials and triumphs that have left us a wealth of rhododendrons in our gardens and parks today.' Through extensive research, Judy traced the connections between plant collectors, British nurseries, wealthy members of the Rhododendron Society, and collectors and growers on the west coast of North America. Figuring prominently was the Greig family and their Royston Nursery. It was a great story and one that I hope she will share with our members some day!

In addition to the fascinating speakers, the Garden Tours every afternoon were definitely a major highlight. Bus loads of participants headed out with their healthy bag lunches to 3 or 4 gardens each afternoon. Gardens included: Abkhazia, Finnerty, Government House, Playfair Park, the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific, The Blackmore Garden, Hopper Garden, Kreiss Garden, Bermuda Place, Eagles Nest, Misty View Farm, Stonefold, Firwood, Varcoe/Kowalyk Gardens, Craigends, Towner Crest, Trelawney Garden, Whitehead Garden, and Butchart Gardens.

In addition to the public gardens, many were the homes of longtime Rhodo enthusiasts such as: Norm and Jean Todd, Evelyn and Nick Weesjes, Dora Kreiss, and Ruth and Etta Cook, just to name a few! The gardens were fabulous. We got to walk along and listen to comments and requests for identification by such well-known Rhodo experts as Peter Cox and Steve Hootman.

The Silent Auction was filled with a wide variety of donated items. There were a number of displays, and even some 'giveaways' to tempt the delegates. The Truss Display was fresh and eye-catching. It certainly did its job, as many delegates could be seen writing down the names of additional rhodos for their wish lists. The plant sellers in the next room certainly benefited by the show, and seemed to be doing a booming business!!

I must say that the plants from our President Paul Wurz's Hidden Acres were some of the best looking there. He had very few left by the end of the Convention. A section of the plant selling area held rhodo seedlings, and each Convention Delegate was allowed to choose one as a gift. After much consultation, I took home a 'Towner Crest' that is now growing nicely in its little pot here at home.

I thoroughly enjoyed the welcome evening at the Royal British Columbia Museum; both for the exhibits and the

desserts, and everyone enjoyed the final banquet and ARS Awards dinner. The entire convention experience was a delight. I had a fun time with fellow NIRS members, and even brought home two little Rhodies. Great Convention!



### *Busy little Rhodoholics*

#### *SHORT NOTE FROM HARRY (Garden Director):*

"I would like to thank the club members that came out to the three work parties we had at the COMOX VALLEY RHODODENDRON GARDEN this year. You did a super job, and we had a lot of fun doing it. The goodies were delicious also."

"You may still feel free to drop in any time, to pull a weed or tidy up. Remember, your garden is appreciated by the dozens of people who walk through it every day, so let's keep it neat."

#### *TRIP TO RHODODENDRON LAKE 2005*

*(by Brian Staton)*

On Saturday, June 5, five members of the North Island Rhodo Society (Paul and Lynn Wurz, Harry Wright, Bernie Guyader and Brian Staton) made their way to Rhododendron Lake. This lake is approx. 15 Kms inland on Weyerhauser logging roads, from N.W. Bay Road junction on the (old) Island Highway. If traveling south, this right hand turnoff is at the first light past the weigh station south of Parksville. One needs to obtain a pass plus maps from the Weyerhauser guard house in order to proceed on their logging roads.

It took about 1 hour to reach the lake's parking lot and after a very short walk to the lake we found ourselves in about an acre of blooming *R. macrophyllum* (the Pacific Rhododendron). Besides these rhodos there are 3 ft. skunk cabbages, water lilies, and many tree varieties. The trails throughout the area had many identification plaques explaining the different plants and trees found in this boggy environment. Since the rhodos are usually in bloom during the first three weeks of June, it is best to plan a trip to the lake during this time frame.

## SNIPPETS FROM SAYWARD SEPT 05

(by Rose-Marie Silkens)

As summer winds down, I like to make notes on the performance of annuals and container plants, particularly ones new to me. When it comes time to make selections the next spring, I need help to job my memories of the previous season's performances.

With my fondness for blue flowers, this year's most exciting addition to my container repertoire is *Streptocarpella* 'Concord Blue.' This lovely little plant reminds me (most unscientifically) of a cross between a cyclamen and an African violet. In fact, *Streptocarpella* is a subgenus of *Streptocarpus*, the Cape primrose, and is at home in humid, warm shade as found in its native South Africa. Sayward has the humid and shade parts, but is a little short on warmth. However, my first experience with streptocarpella has been most gratifying. I have it in a hanging basket with lemon yellow rose-form begonias, and the intense mid-blue of the newcomers has been very generously displayed. My plan is to pot up the individual streptocarpellas in October and try to over winter them indoors in a windowsill planter normally holding African violets.

Another blue-flowered container plant new to me this year, though not new in commerce, is *Scaevola aemula*, fan flower. A trailing native of Australia and Polynesia, this generous bloomer has a graceful habit and a colour that works with any planting scheme. The blossoms are fan-shaped or, as a friend puts it, like half-daisies. As I prefer calm colour schemes and simple planting combinations for hanging baskets, I have used this plant in my own baskets either with the lovely deep-pink *Diascia* or the soft-orange *Mimulus aurantiacus* 'Tropicana.'

A few years ago I tried starting *laurentia* from seed. European relations had sent me photos of this plant spilling spectacularly from their hanging baskets, and kindly sent me seeds to try myself. *Solenopsis axillaris*, syn. *Isotoma* or *Laurentia axillaris*, usually marketed as *laurentia* or blue star creeper, is a member of the campanula family and is a perennial in its native Australia. I started my seeds in the house in February that first year, and had a few sporadic flowers on a 4" plant by Thanksgiving. The flowers are very pretty: shades of blue and star shaped, not especially showy but then I quite like subtlety. I kept one plant in the house over winter and had quite a nice container plant the next season, though I never got viable seed. The last few years *laurentia* has been available as a bedding annual, so this spring I purchased two flats to see how they might fare. I potted them all on to 4" pots in May, in hopes of using them for containers at a relations' summer wedding, and kept them in my greenhouse. By wedding time in mid-July only two were blooming, and as I write this in the third week of August, about half are showing some color. For one flat I tried shocking them

into bloom by watering less, but the plants have become very sulky looking and haven't bloomed more readily than the others. I'll try over wintering some again, but think I must face up to the fact that Sayward is just not the right environment for *laurentia*.

One plant that does do very well in the misty climes around Johnstone Strait is *Salicornia virginica*, syn. *S. pacifica*. Sea asparagus is a rhizomatous perennial that appears on sheltered beaches and tide flats all along the BC coast. In late spring and early summer, the tender young shoots are a nutritious delicacy. The handsome, dark green shoots should be blanched in fresh water or soaked for several hours to remove the extra salt, and then can be sautéed with a little butter and garlic, or added to a rice pilaf or a salad. Sea asparagus is sold at upscale markets on the lower mainland, but half the fun of putting it on the menu is to paddle into a quiet beach and harvest your own.

Every September Bruce and I travel to the Okanagan for our annual wine stock-up. Except on the way home when the wine cases are topped with flats of tomatoes and peaches that must be dealt with, we avoid freeways. Each year we choose a leisurely, roundabout route to the interior, and this year's plan is to drive down the Oregon coast and then return north through eastern Oregon and Washington. We're still plotting possible routes, but each option seems to magically pass nearby Eugene, Oregon. Bruce has heard me whine about wanting to visit Greer Gardens for many years, but I haven't yet reminded him it's near Eugene....

## BOOK REVIEW - SEPT 05

### *THE COLOUR ENCYCLOPEDIA OF HOSTAS*

Diana Grenfell & Michael Shadrack  
Timber Press 2004

This is a large, heavy book, and so full of useful information and wonderful photos that it will never be a "coffee table" book, but a well-used well of information. As soon as we are able to contact the current Canadian distributor for Timber Press, I hope to add my name to the list of purchasers. This copy was borrowed from Rose-Marie Silkens, and I was very reluctant to return it.

I realize that, just as with Rhodos, there is an unending stream of new hybrids and varieties on the market, but this book lists a great many that we have not found locally as yet. Tissue culture and specialized nurseries have now produced thousands of cultivars to join the many species, some still not found in the mountains of Japan and Korea.

HRH the Prince of Wales has a large collection of Hostas, and wrote an enthusiastic Forward to the book. There are about 7590 hostas pictured and described, and there are chapters on green hostas, blue hostas, hostas with marginally and medio-variegated leaves, and more.

Alas, I did not find any sure-fire ways to prevent the slugs and deer from tasting hosta leaves, but from my experience, the plants with thick tough leaves are usually left alone, but thin, delicate variegated leaves are often chewed badly.

### **SPECIAL PLANTS**

Jane Taylor, Quadrille Pub. Ltd., 2004

The author has chosen about 500 plants - tree, shrubs, perennial and annual garden plants, great variety and the best (in her opinion) examples. She has offered background and framework plants, verticals, short-season, woodland, pond and bog plants, with many hints for planting and propagating. Many wonderful photos are included in the book, by many photographers. Apart from the Introduction, there is little generalized writing, but each plant illustrated is discussed thoroughly. Similar plants are also often pictured, for instance, several kinds of Japanese maples, several Cornus. I found it difficult to put the book down, and consider it an ideal book to buy for oneself or for a gift. A copy can be found in the Campbell River library.

### **GARDEN HINTS**

Fine Gardening #105 (Sept-Oct 05) includes a useful article on Planting Under Trees, and how many times has someone asked "What plants will be happy in the shade of my - cedar, alder, fir - tree?" This article lists many plants, some of them not hardy or unknown here, and trees that dislike or tolerate disturbance, many of these not seen here except perhaps in large parks.

Nevertheless there are many good hints in the article, and I will pick out a few that will be useful. First, start with small plants and try not to damage the tree trunk or any thick roots. If you need to remove grass, lay wet newspaper 5-6 sheets thick, covered with mulch, leave for several months, over winter if possible. Dig small holes in this material in which to plant. If you are in a hurry, spray with glyphosphate (Roundup or similar) but be sure to avoid hitting the tree trunk or nearby plants.

Trees that dislike having roots disturbed include cherries and plums, dogwoods, hemlocks and pines. Trees that don't mind a little disturbance include red cedars, crab apples, hawthorns, poplars and willows.

Among the shrubs listed as being happy under trees are ninebarks and snowberries. (Of course, as snowberries are native here and spread by root and seed in every direction, I would not recommend them - I have millions already). Plants that do well under trees include columbines, Tiarella, Japanese grasses such as Hakonechloa and painted ferns, Pulmonaria and Siberian irises. Note several of these grow to 3-4 ft. so tree branches must be higher. Tiny plants not mentioned are cyclamens and various small bulbs such as eranthus and crocus, which bloom early and catch the winter sun.

They don't mind a baking in summer. Cyclamen hederifolium usually starts to bloom with the first rainfall in late August, but I have several flowers out now (Aug. 1)

### **RHODO NEWS FROM THE COXES AT GLENDICK**

Quoting a news item in Amateur Gardening, 9 April, "A plant created in a test tube will be the centre of attention at Scotland's national gardening event. It will debut at Gardening Scotland 2005 in Edinburgh in June.

Azalea "Fragrant Star" is being branded a "strongly scented Franken-azalea" by show organizers because the plant was artificially created in a test-tube by adding colchicines - an extra chromosome that makes a stronger, more rigid plant with improved vigor. It comes from plant hunter Ken Cox of Glendoick Gardens near Perth.

Ken will also take the wraps off Azalea "Glendoick Glacier", said to be the first double white dwarf azalea that is suitable for Scotland."

Ed. Note: According to the map, the area around Perth is the only Zone 7 part of the British Isles. All the rest is Zone 8, or 9 along the western coast. We are listed in Zone 7, with pockets of Z8 and Z9. That is why it is wiser to observe your neighbors' gardens than to take advice from books or magazines produced in the Eastern U.S or Eastern Canada.

### **CORNUS (DOGWOODS)**

There are many varieties of these handsome plants; unfortunately our native *C. nutallii* has suffered and often died from a nasty leaf blotch disorder. However, there are many others, and Clive Justice described several in an article in the Vancouver Rhodo Society newsletter "Indumentum" in June 2004. I will quote as well as condense from his writing:

"One of the outstanding trees we saw on a recent walkabout of the Ted and Mary Greig garden with Allyne Cook, was *Cornus controversa*, native to China and Japan. There are two of these giant dogwoods, one in the centre of the Pitch & Putt links and one in the lower northeast portion of the garden that Allyne planted about 40 years ago.

Among the 45 or so species of *Cornus*, many of which are fine trees, shrubs and groundcovers, *C. controversa* is reputed to be the tallest, reaching 60 ft. Of course we have the native Pacific Dogwood, *C. nutallii*, as well as our own locally-produced improvement, *C. 'Eddie's White Wonder'* (*C. nutallii* x *C. florida*), with larger bracts, hybrid vigour and richer fall color. In the wild, *C. nutallii* has been measured at over 100 ft.....

The large bracts on these dogwoods are absent on *C. controversa*, instead there are masses of tiny four-petal four-stamen flowers arranged in large, flat umbels.....

There are several no-bract cornus used ornamentally besides *C. controversa*: *C. alternifolia* is a small American tree and *C. macrophylla* is a medium-height shrubby Asian tree. Shrubs include the native *C. stolonifera*, with yellow, red or purple stems; European *C. alba*, with red stems and yellow or white variegated forms, and Asian *C. bretschneiderii*, with downy stems.

Bract or no-bract is not where the botanical confusion lies. It is with the leaves, which are arranged oppositely on the branches of all dogwoods except for *C. alternifolia* and *C. controversa*....Here in our coastal gardens with mild cloudy climate *C. controversa* does well and enriches both diversity and beauty over two of our seasons: cool spring and warm autumn."

### "WHAT CAUSES THE DEMISE OF MY RHODOS"

is the title of an article written by Ken Gibson and printed in the Peace Arch Rhodo newsletter in Sept. 2001. The advice given may not apply to our area now that summers appear to be longer, hotter and drier and winters warmer. But it is interesting to read and will perhaps encourage discussion on the subject.

Ken attended a meeting some 25 years ago where the consensus of a panel discussion was that too much water caused most rhodo problems. Sharp drainage was considered very important. Ken, of course, has much more rain in winter than we do, and the West Coast also has summer fog, which cools and moistens plants during the night.

So Ken does not "plant" rhodos, he "places" them. First, he washes away mud with high pressure. He uses chips or sawdust to start with, and covers exposed roots with compost. The root collar can be higher than ground level (he says 16-18" for large plants). He pounds the plant down and covers the sloping sides with chips and needles. Be sure there is no clay-like dirt on the root collar.

Ed. Note: I didn't realize, some years ago rhodos seemed to be packed in clay for shipping, to keep them moist I presume. I planted a lovely Scarlet Wonder without removing the clay and wondered why the plant was dead in 6 months. These days, most rhodos seem to be packed in containers of coarse bark chips.

Ken often secures plants for a year or two with black electrical wire and 8" sections of old garden hose, going from the base of neighboring plants to a higher spot on the transplanted one. Mary Greig used to say "a happy rhodo is one that has just been moved." So if you have an unhappy rhodo, perhaps some of this advice will be of use.

To test your soil for drainage, dig a small hole about 12" deep and 18" wide, and pour in 5 gal. of water. It should all disappear within 5 minutes. Or, make a large "snowball" of soil, pack it firmly and set it on a flat surface. If it stays together, poke it as it should fall apart if you have the proper growing medium.

Soil changes a lot in 40 years of domestic use. The amount of shade is far greater and air circulation is far less. Look for old rhodos in old places. The healthiest are planted up high.

Ken explains that after 40 years on his hill, that once turned to dust, he has a continuous battle with too much moisture. He has cut ditches up and down the hill and used truckloads of cedar sawdust to soak up the mud. He uses 23-3-23 fertilizer (slow release) in March-April-May and waters individual plants only when one has droopy leaves.

### RECIPE REQUESTS:

As requested at the Rhodo Work Bee a delicious recipe for Noni's

#### **STRAWBERRY / RHUBARB COFFEE CAKE.**

**Rhubarb Filling:** – Make first then cool before using.

In saucepan combine 1 pound fresh rhubarb, cut into 1-inch pieces (3 cups) or one 16 oz package frozen rhubarb, and one 16 oz package frozen sliced strawberries, thawed. (I use 3 cups stewed rhubarb and 3 cups fresh sliced strawberries). Cover and cook 5 minutes, add 2 Tbsp lemon juice. Combine 1 cup sugar and 1/3 cup cornstarch; add to rhubarb mixture. Cook and stir until thickened and bubbly; cool.

#### **Cake Mixture:**

3 C all purpose flour	1 C sugar
1 tsp Baking soda	1 tsp salt
1 tsp Baking powder	
1 C butter or margarine	
1 C buttermilk (or 1 C milk slightly warmed with 1Tbsp lemon juice)	
2 beaten eggs	1 tsp vanilla



#### **Topping:**

3/4 C sugar	1/2 C All purpose flour
1/4 C butter or margarine	

Mix together the cake dry ingredients, then cut in the 1 cup butter to fine crumbs. Beat together buttermilk, eggs and vanilla; add to dry ingredients. Stir to moisten. Spread half batter in greased 13x9x2 inch baking pan. Spread cooled filling over batter in pan. Spoon remaining batter in small mounds atop filling. Combine topping ingredients cutting in the butter to fine crumbs. Sprinkle crumbs over batter in pan. Bake 350° oven for 40 – 45 minutes. Cool, Cut and Enjoy!