

Vancouver Summer Beauty Guide: Spa & Salon Special

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Eva Longoria

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The New Current

Are you a painphobe? The latest laser for hair removal won't leave you cringing, and it works on all skin shades. by Anne Rasminsky

From the moment I entered puberty, I've surrendered myself to the lifelong and sometimes-painful process of hair removal—to think how many hours I've lost to the mighty razor blade or hot wax, only to have my thick, dark hair grow right back. It's an exercise in futility that even Sisyphus would find absurd. I've tried laser hair removal, which turned out to be acutely painful, too expensive and, most important, left 50 per cent of my hair. And 50 per cent of too much hair is plenty. So I was skeptical about trying the Sciton Dual Nd:YAG (in tech jargon, neodymium: yttrium aluminum garnet) laser, the most recent innovation in laser hair removal, which claims to be fast and comfortable for all skin tones. It sounded way too good to be true.

"You're ideal, you're perfect!" exclaims Lesley Bray, a paramedical laser technician at CosMedix MD in Toronto. Alas, she's referring to my fair skin and dark hair, an unfortunate combination that makes me not only the ideal candidate for all laser hair removal systems but

also self-conscious in a tank top. Before we get started on my underarm area, Bray reminds me that there's no such thing as permanent hair removal, only a permanent reduction, which I'm told is significant. "The number of follicles we have is fixed," says Dr. Frances Jang, a cosmetic dermatologist at Skinworks in Vancouver. "But as we age, with hormonal changes what we notice is that some of the vellus hairs [baby-fine hairs] will convert to terminal hairs [coarse, dark hairs]. Think of the old lady who's plucking her chin hairs." Who's she calling an old lady?

Lasers have come a long way since their inception about 10 years ago. The original systems weren't as effective for long-term results and could easily damage darker skin shades because the pigment (found in the superficial epidermal layer) absorbed too much laser energy. "As soon as we moved on to someone with some ethnicity or finer hair, we started running into problems with burning, scabbing and sometimes even permanent whitening or darkening of the skin," says Jang. ▶

Photography by Moolishi; Hair and makeup by Hung Vanngo for Lancôme/Giovanni Artist Management; Swimsuit by Shan



Underarms are a common area to get zapped

YAGs use a longer wavelength to penetrate farther. "Deeper penetration means that you're concentrating more on the target and bypassing surface pigmentation, because hair follicles tend to be deeper in the skin. And that's where we want to focus," says Dr. John Goldhar, a cosmetic dermatologist and director of CosMedix MD. It also means that YAGs are safe for darker skin types. "Most lasers, because of their shorter wavelengths, can't get by the pigment on skin. So they pose a real threat of discoloration to anyone with darker skin or with tans."

More important, I personally find the Sciton YAG less painful than older systems. I had a treatment under my arms a few years ago, and the sensation was like a staple gun being repeatedly shot deep within my nerves—and I have a very high pain threshold. Fortunately, the Sciton YAG is equipped with a unique chilled window unit that keeps the skin cool, making the procedure more comfortable. "The risk of thermal injury to the skin is virtually nil," says Bray. "Also, people's tolerance is much greater with this laser because they're just not feeling as much heat." The Sciton YAG is five times faster than other lasers because it uses two lasers that are fired alternately. Speed is enhanced with a scanning device that automatically lays down laser pulses, whereas most other lasers are manual.

But while the cooling head makes the treatment far less painful, there is some discomfort akin to what I would imagine lighting a match against my armpit would feel like, over and over again. In fact, if you aren't feeling any discomfort at all (and this goes for any laser

system you use), then you're missing the treatment. "The hair follicle absorbs energy from the laser and re-releases that energy in the form of heat," says Goldhar. "The pain you feel is the energy release, so if you're getting more energy release you're going to get more damage to the surrounding hair follicle."

And it's the damage that stops hair from growing back, so beware of non-medical practices. "In general, the lasers approved for medical use are much stronger," says Jang. "YAGs have allowed us to get those remaining hairs later on in a treatment without compromising the skin."

The fallout period post-treatment is also different. "With a lot of the other lasers, you'll get that immediate shedding of the hair, where

"I do notice a reduction in hair, including slower, more sporadic growth. It's also finer."

little dots tend to expel from the follicle," says Bray. "With the Sciton YAG, you don't get the same shedding, so your hair may still grow in normally." Because of the laser's deeper penetration, the hair may take up to two weeks to shed. Jang adds, "Ultimately when you're ready for your next treatment in six to eight weeks, you'll notice that some of the hairs aren't growing back at all. And what is growing back is growing much more slowly."

The cost is more competitive than what I remember (underarms and bikini area are around \$200 to \$250 each, per session, with four to eight treatments per area being the standard), and a few weeks later I do notice a reduction in hair, including slower, more sporadic growth. It's also finer. Still, in the name of vanity and the pursuit of the unattainable dream of hairless perfection I'll continue to—excuse *The Karate Kid* reference—wax on and wax off. I considered growing out my leg and arm hair as an act of feminist defiance, but now that metrosexuals are the symbols of modern-day masculinity, any fight for equality on my part only demands more manicures and even more of this laser business. ■

For a list of Canadian dermatologists using Sciton Dual Nd:YAGs, visit fashionmagazine.com/laser.

At-Home Standbys

Waxing: Bliss Ingrown Hair Eliminating

Peeling Pads (\$43.85, at delineation.ca) are soaked with alpha- and beta-hydroxy acids to ward off bumps. **Parissa Quick & Easy Wax Strips** (\$11, at drugstores) are warmed up between your hands. Azulene oil prevents ingrowns. **Veet Comfort Waxing Kit** (\$11, at drugstores) includes a Comfort Spray to prep skin. **Bliss Poetic Waxing Kit** (\$50.10, at

delineation.ca) comes with wax, a disinfectant, waxing lotion and spatulas.

Nair Cire Divine Microwave Wax (\$16, at drugstores) can



take on the shortest of hairs and includes moisturizing towelettes.

Shaving: Gillette Venus Vibrance (\$16.50, at drugstores) is electric and can be used in the shower. **Aveeno**

Positively Smooth Moisturizing Lotion (\$9, at drugstores) claims to minimize the look of hair, making shaving less of a necessity. **Kiehl's Close-Shaverettes Simply Mahvelous Legs Shave Cream** (\$24.50, at kiehls.com) feels like butta and leaves legs feeling just as soft. **Avon Skin So Soft Hair Removal Cream** (\$9, at avon.ca) eliminates hair, exfoliates and softens in one fell swoop.

