

Out of the cooker and
into the boiling pot

MANDRAKE 8.2

Six months have passed since the last Mandrake boxed set was released, so now seems like as good a time as any to put on show the latest efforts of the MandrakeSoft developers and the community that has built up around them.

Mandrake Linux takes upon itself the role of being the cutting edge Linux system for Intel, AMD and PowerPC processors. This is helped by the way MandrakeSoft communicates with its users through its **Cooker** project, while maintaining a firm belief in ease of use and accessibility for new or less experienced users. Because of this ease of use and the excellent array of programs and desktop utilities, Mandrake Linux is often thought of as being suitable for desktop use only. In truth, a full and wide ranging set of server applications come supplied with Mandrake Linux making it a versatile all rounder.

What's available?

Mandrake Linux 8.2 ships in three forms:

- The 8.2 ProSuite Edition features eight CDs (including two special server CDs), one DVD, and two comprehensive manuals. Also included is a subscription for two update CDs – to be received during the product life – which contain security and bug fixes. The ProSuite is aimed squarely at the high-end enterprise sector with requirements for a product that is highly dependable, secure and scalable. US\$149.
- The PowerPack Edition features seven CDs packed with thousands of the best Open Source and commercial applications, an installation guide, plus a detailed reference manual. US\$69.
- The Standard Edition includes three CDs plus an installation and user's guide. Price to be confirmed.



The MandrakeSoft Web site only quotes prices in US\$, which we have quoted for you to use as a guide. No price was available on the Web site for the Standard Edition at the time of writing, but as a guide Linux Mandrake 8.1 Standard Edition was sold in the UK for £32.

You also have the opportunity to download the three disc set from the Mandrake Web site or from its various mirrors. You may even be able to buy copies of these downloaded sets from places like LinuxEmporium.

What's new?

Mandrake Linux 8.2 doesn't come with any startlingly new packages, but should be considered a revamp of 8.1, with lots of improvements. The kernel has moved up to 2.4.18 and includes a special enterprise version for those of you that need support for large amounts of memory – greater than 1,024Mb – and are lucky enough to have multi-processor units. The use of this new kernel now means that Supermount can safely return to the distribution, the dropping of which has been the source of much consternation.

As mentioned earlier, Mandrake Linux is well positioned to act in the role of server, something often forgotten or overlooked. To this end, a new version of Samba has been included, which now uses XFS to allow Windows file sharing with NT like ACLs (Access Control Lists).

Sometime around the end of April, shelves will have been packed with the latest boxed set release from MandrakeSoft, Mandrake Linux version 8.2. Will they still be there or have they all been snapped up? Colin Murphy has the answer

Cooker – bubbling under

MandrakeSoft makes a big effort to enlist the help of the community, be it for actual development or for testing, with the main bulk of this done through its Cooker project. Cooker is a Mandrake Linux in development (if you were to look now, you will see what will be version 8.3) where new packages get added and access and compatibility to those packages gets improved. Because of this constant change, things will often be broken, or become unstable at best.

Cooker is being made available for people to report what is wrong with it, so you should not consider using it for a working system, unless you like to live very dangerously! Cooker can be downloaded from the MandrakeSoft Web site, as well as from some mirrors. The rolling, automatic update is achieved with tools like URPMI – the same tool which is also used to update the stable version – you just point it at the Cooker directories instead.

Occasionally, snapshots are made of a minimally unstable version of Cooker for those who still want to try out some of the most recent developments, but don't want to invest time in maintaining it regularly, or have access to do that.

To participate with Cooker you really should subscribe to the busy Cooker mailing list, details of which can be found at <http://www.linux-mandrake.com/en/cookerdevel.php3>.

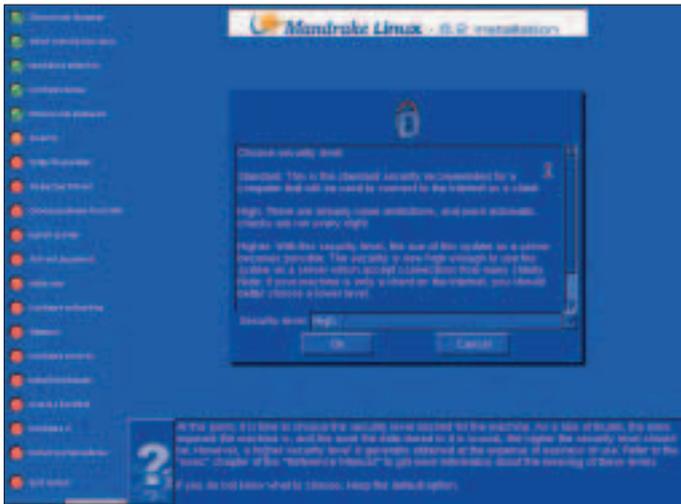


Figure 1: Here the on-screen prompts ask you about what security level you want



Figure 2: Disk partitioning can be confusing for the new user, but the graphical partition manager makes it less stressful



Figure 3: Groups of packages can be selected and then individually tailored to suit your needs

and, more importantly, lots of contextual help on what information is required from you: from something as simple as selecting your security level (Figure 1) to something as complex – for a first time user – as reformatting your hard drive (Figure 2), or (Figure 3) showing how easy it is to customise the packages you want to install. It is worthwhile reading all of the information presented on these screens, even if you are comfortable with

To help you with server-side applications you will also have access to Apache 1.3.23, PHP 4.1.2, MySQL 3.23.47, PostgreSQL 7.2, Sendmail 8.12.1 and a host of other servers.

It was really most unfortunate that the freeze date for the development of Linux Mandrake 8.2 came just days before the fixed and final release of KDE3, which meant missing out on a big scoop that SuSE has picked up.

Ease of installation

The accessibility of Mandrake Linux comes in part from the effort put in by the developers to make the installation as easy as possible, thanks to the DrakX program. If you've used Mandrake Linux before then the graphical installation will still be familiar to you, though there have been some pleasant tweaks. Should this be your first Mandrake install, or even your first Linux install, then you're in for an equally pleasant surprise.

The graphical installer can take on the role of hand holding assistant, or, should you need no hand holding, just give you something pretty to look at during the install. The graphical install screens give you plenty of information about what is happening

Mandrake installs, you will learn more about what is going on during the installation.

Right from the start, the installation program will ask you to choose between a recommended install, where DrakX will make the bulk of the decisions for you, or an expert install, where you get the chance to tailor and control a lot of the options and paths during the installation. You don't need to be an expert to use this class of installation, but you will need to be a lot more interactive, which is not such a bad thing in our judgment.

A new minimal installation mode, which installs nothing but the base system, is now available. This installation mode leaves users with a functional, but very basic Mandrake Linux installation taking up only 65Mb on their hard disk. Since there will be no graphical servers, you will be left a command line when this minimum installation is first booted, though this does give you the opportunity to then continue to install whatever packages you wish – giving you full control over how you want to tailor your system. One command line tool to help you do this is URPMI, an automatic software management system, which provides a hassle-free way to install and upgrade applications, via a network if necessary.

Configuration

The installation process takes in a lot of the configuration information so that you very nearly have a working system the first time you boot your machine, this applies to things like your network connections and printer setup, unlike some other Linux distributions which put you through a post install configuration process.

Even so, there is always some configuration to do, things on your system change, maybe because you have added new hardware or want to run new services. Mandrake Linux makes use of yet more graphical wizardry, now allowing the less experienced users to shape and control their system. The Mandrake Control Center is a central repository for these graphical wizards and will be familiar to Mandrake Linux users of previous versions, but it has been overhauled and improved for version 8.2.

The new 'Mount Points' section in the Control Center now allows you to set up and configure NFS mount points, Samba mount points and partition sharing as well as the familiar control that you had over the mount points on your fixed hard drives as well as removable media like CD-ROMs.

To help you know how and what to configure, it's good to see that the Mandrake documentation has been reworked. The documentation is available to you on your local system, enabling you to read and search with your favourite browser and is also included in dead tree format for when you have trouble getting to sleep. Access to such help makes a system much easier to access and understand.

What you get

There are thousands of packages supplied with Mandrake Linux, here is a list of some of the ones

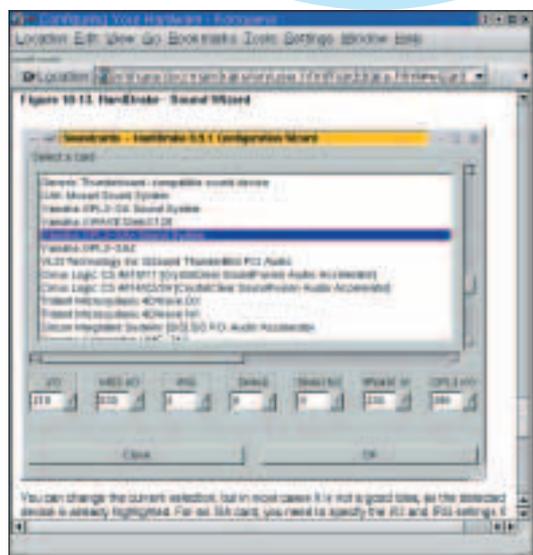


Figure 4: Just one of the many configuration wizards available



Figure 5: Mandrake Control Center set to configure some mount points

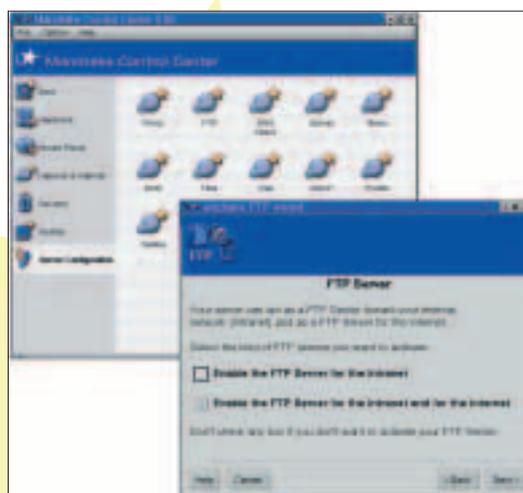


Figure 6: Setting configuration data to run services like an FTP server is straightforward with the help of the graphical wizard

most people will find a use for on a day to day basis in the field of multimedia and productivity:

- Mozilla 0.9.8 and Galeon 1.0.3: Web browsers.
- XMMS 1.2.6: play and manage MP3 and Ogg Vorbis files and CDs.
- Grip 2.98: rip your favourite CDs.
- GIMP 1.2.3, gPhoto2: so you can download and manipulate all of your digital data.
- Gnomemeeting 0.84: share good times with family and friends with this fully-featured video conferencing software.
- KOffice 1.1.1: KDE office suite.
- StarOffice 6.0: the full-featured and MS Office compatible office suite, though this is only available within the Mandrake Linux ProSuite and PowerPack Editions. If you are going for one of the lesser editions you will still have the chance to play with OpenOffice.

At the heart of the system you will find improved support for FireWire devices as well as USB 2.0, i830 DRM, ATA133 and the GeForce 3 graphics chip set. You will also find:

- XFree86 4.2
- Glibc 2.2.4
- Gcc 2.96 and 3.0

Mandrake Linux 8.2	
Supplier	MandrakeSoft
Price	To be confirmed
Web	www.linux-mandrake.com/en/
For	Easy to install and configure
Against	Just missed out on KDE3
rating	★★★★★