



cool wool

Tropical temperatures don't have to wilt your wardrobe

When Englishmen ventured forth in the midday sun, they were not as mad as hatters—or the mad dogs Noel Coward linked them to in song. In their tropical-weight wool garments, Englishmen knew how to keep their cool. You could do worse than follow their example for sartorial comfort when temperatures soar.

Lighten your layers

Lightweight wool fabrics are perfect for summer because they wick moisture away from your body, allow for cool air to pass through to your skin and come in a versatile range of soft, quick-drying weaves perfect for a variety of suits and sport jackets.

"When buying a suit, always go for wool—always! It outperforms any other fiber," said Alease M. McClenningham, academic director of fashion marketing at the Art Institute of Charlotte. "For those in warmer climates, try tropical-weight wool. It's a natural fiber that breathes and easily adapts to air conditioning or the heat of city streets."

High-twist, 100 or Super 110 worsted wools make a fine cloth of a light weight suitable for spring, summer, and fall garments, but too light for winter outerwear.

Layers work well for keeping your cool. Cotton, Cool-Max, or silk socks and underlayers help you stay comfortable by pulling ("wicking") perspiration away from your skin. In the same vein, wearing socks will keep you cooler than going without socks, and reduce foot odor in the bargain.

Loosen up

The weaves used in tropical-weight spring and summer wool and wool-blend fabrics are lighter and thinner, allowing more air circulation, compared to winter's dense twills and tweeds. Look for plain weaves, lightweight flannels, crepes, and jerseys in superfine merino

In a jungle town where the sun beats down to the rage of man and beast

The English garb of the English sahib merely gets a bit more creased.

In Bangkok at twelve o'clock they foam at the mouth and run,

But mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun.

—Noel Coward

wool blended with fabrics like silk for stability and holding a crease.

Lightweight gabardines and corded wools are also good choices for year-round wear. Avoid thick, itchy wools, which will cause you to perspire more.

Partially lined ("unconstructed") sport jackets and loosely structured jackets offer other alternatives for business-casual dressing without loss of dignity. Generous sizing allows for unencumbered air flow.

Stay crisp

Naturally wrinkle-resistant wool has a major advantage over wrinkle-prone linen in the

summer, although both are natural fabrics with good breathability.

"Traditionally speaking, 100 percent wool is the best fabric for business suits. Now, I am not speaking of heavyweight wintry wool; there are tropical-weight wool fabrics, highly refined, that are extremely comfortable even in the summer," said Sherry Maysonave, founder and president of Empowerment Enterprises, one of America's leading communication-image firms. "Linen is a marvelous fabric, but it wrinkles too easily to be worn for serious business."

Because summer-weight wools wrinkle a little more than winter wool weaves, consider having your suit steamed and pressed more frequently to keep its tidy appearance up to par.

Under your wool suit, starch your cotton dress shirt. Starching keeps you cooler because the crisp fabric will stand away from your skin.

Rotate what you wear and allow suits to dry and air completely between wearings. With summer's extra perspiration, you might need a few more changes of clothing for the summer months compared to cooler-weather months.

Go bright

Lighter colors are better during the summer months because light shades don't attract the sun as much, which keeps your body cooler. Colors shift in the summer to lighter grays and navy blue instead of basic black and charcoal gray.

Avoid weekday clothing with themes like life preservers, cowboy hats, or golf motifs, which are better left for weekend casual wear.

As with all clothing choices, exercise caution. Summer isn't the time to dress like a beach bum at work. Flip-flops aren't acceptable footwear outside of college campuses. And Bermuda shorts, though appropriate for British colonial dress uniforms, have no place in the office for employees of either gender.