

CONTRIBUTORS

Opinion | For one season a year, all the rules change

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At Ashbridges Bay, on Lake Ontario, sunbathers wade into the water to beat the heat, in Toronto, on June 30, 2026.

Richard Lautens/Toronto Star

By Kerah Gordon-Solmon, Contributor

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I love summer. Not all the time, and not in all ways: I don't love when the air feels like soup, or my weather app tells me (as it's telling me now) it's 34 C, 62 per cent humidity and "feels like a sauna" out there.

But just a few days ago, with the temperature in the balmy 20s, I was drinking \$10 white wine on a patio that tasted (the wine, not the patio) like citrus and slate. Guzzling glasses, discussing seasonally appropriate topics such as, *Why are bosses?* and, *Isn't it gauche to insist on calling a meeting on a summer afternoon?* When the weather is like this, when the wine is flowing crisp and affordable, even the most punctilious bureaucrats feel the urge to pack up their beach umbrellas and head to Muskoka for the weekend. Or at least to Toronto Island for the day.

This heatwave will pass. There will be daytime patios again.

I love the smells of summer. Not all of them. Not the gasoline and garbage smell you get when you turn the wrong corner at the wrong moment. But turn the right corner, and you're engulfed in the smell of lilacs.

While "researching" this piece, I stood in a grove in Ramsden Park one morning and inhaled deeply, over and over. I was trying to pinpoint what it smelled like. It was hopeless. I came up with *leaves*, *dirt*, *humidity* — and *sun-poached*. I barely cared that I'd drifted into self-parody; whatever it was, it smelled delicious, and isn't it a good, healthy kind of humbling for language to fail from time to time?

Summer is a season for drifting. There's a distinctive way we tend to move in summer — a slow, bobble-headed underwater walk. I've felt it in my own movement and seen it on the street. I even love that swaddling haze of humidity and heat, nature's Valium. It gives deadlines the weight of mirages, makes obligations feel abstract and faraway.

I love the decadence summer invites. Summer made midnight karaoke seem like a good idea (the sun hadn't set that long ago!), and it kind of was.

There are so many ways of being decadent in the summer. Even sweating feels decadent in the summer.

Getting dressed is so easy, it feels like cheating. No layers, no socks, not even pants — just a tank top that doubles as a dress, and done.

Eating is easy. Cooking is redundant. The rules of summer say all the nourishment you need is in bread and cheese and fruit and wine.

The grocery store proves it: colours for days, and everything you could possibly (or at least reasonably) want is local. Shopping is disencumbered from politicized mental contortions. *Do I want grapes badly enough to buy*

the American import? The answer is an insouciant *No, look at all these cherries!*

More disencumbrance from politics — *the politicians have all gone home*. On the one hand, five months is an awfully long paid vacation away from Queen's Park. On the other hand, it's five months relatively free of Ford government bombshells, and doesn't that make your shoulders and brain unclench just a little?

More to love: summer songs, summer movies, summer reading. Sometimes the song of the summer is determined by the zeitgeist. This summer, I've chosen my own: Bat for Lashes' live cover of "The Boys of Summer," by Don Henley. (It was recorded in 2019, but summer laughs in the face of timeliness.)

Go listen. I'll wait.

Summer reading has no rules. That's the point. Well, there is one rule: it shouldn't feel too dutiful. I nominate Jilly Cooper's "Imogen" as the definitive summer novel. Set in the disco era, it's a satirical Cinderella story that follows its British heroine on a road trip to the French Riviera, with comic set-pieces to rival Kingsley Amis's "Lucky Jim" and the greatest makeover montage in English literature. The Toronto Public Library has the audiobook for you to enjoy while dozing or drifting.

The only rule of summer movies is that the theatre be air-conditioned.

I would love to go the movies, except it's too hot to leave the house. And I've been called to a work meeting next week, whose reality insists on puncturing my sweet summer sedation. Sadly, it's not a mirage. *Why are bosses?*

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