

Housedoctor

How to make the most of your home during the British summer

by Ann Maurice

Summer Time... and the Living is Easy

Living in Britain takes a lot of getting used to in many ways. But one of the most difficult things for most “transplants” to accustom themselves to here is, of course, the weather. Those long dark days, the grey skies, and endless rain and drizzle... when summer is finally officially upon us it seems as though it has been light years since we've felt the warmth of the sun. Over the years I've found that the only predictable thing about summer here is that it is always unpredictable. It can last a week or two, and as soon as we get accustomed to it, it can change radically. The good news is that if it does disappear for a while, it is guaranteed to return in the blink of an eye.

Coming from San Francisco where Mark Twain was quoted to have said “The coldest winter I've ever spent was a summer in San Francisco,” I've found summer in Britain to be well worth the wait...the pleasantly hot days and sultry nights, the verdant green

countryside dotted with wildflowers, and most especially the positive change in mood that reverberates throughout the nation. But what I find most amazing about summer here is the length of its days. With approximately eighteen hours of daylight at our disposal, one's entire perspective changes... there seems to be so much more time for any and everything. However, as we have all sadly come to learn, it will be gone before we know it, so how can we make the best use of a British summer?

Making the Most of Summer

- *Lighten up.* With all the extra daylight available, bring it into your home as best you can. Pull back your curtains. Clean your windows inside and out. If possible replace heavier fabrics on your windows with light-weight sheers or voiles. If you need privacy for night time go for the layered look. Experiment with blinds instead of curtains for a ‘cleaner’ line.
- *Change your colour scheme.* It is the simplest and most inexpensive way to alter the mood of a room. Paint one room or even one wall in your house in a colour that breathes a little easier... fresh green, breezy blue, soft peach, lemon yellow...whatever you are drawn to. The important thing here is to choose a colour that makes you feel good.
- *Invest in new some accessories.* If your larger pieces of furniture are relatively neutral, you can adapt any room to the changing seasons with a few simple additions...throws or slipcovers, new cushions or cushion covers, a new bedding ensemble, fresh towels, area rugs or matting, baskets... think lighter, fresher, softer. Change some of your artwork to reflect the change of seasons... framed botanicals, scenes of the countryside or the beach all say ‘summer is here’.
- *Bring the outdoors in.* Remove any furniture that might be blocking your doors or windows. Pay careful attention to the views from all your windows. If you don't have anything pleasant to look at, install window boxes and fill them with attractive flowering plants. Have fresh flowers in every room of your home.
- *Bring the fragrances of summer into your home.* As well using fresh flowers you can make use of potpourri, scented candles, or essential oils. My personal favourites are lavender, lily, mimosa, rose, and tuber rose (not all at once). Avoid products that are not ‘natural’, and remember, a little goes a long way.
- *Use your outdoor space.* Try your hand at



gardening... you may discover you have ‘green fingers’ after all. If you have even a small garden or patio, spend some time turning it into a useable extra room. We are all fighting for space here, so why ignore the obvious? Invest in some outdoor furniture... a dining table and chairs and dine and entertain al fresco. Create an outdoor play area for the children.

- *Experience the tastes of summer.* Instead of cooking indoors, buy a grill and use it. Experiment with some new lighter recipes making use of the abundance of fresh seasonal vegetables and fruits available in local markets. Serve iced fruit herbal teas instead of soft drinks, they are cooling and refreshing and much better for you.
- *Take on a project.* Make use of those extra hours of daylight to do something you've been putting off or have been waiting to do. Whether it is writing, painting, reading or just spending more time with your loved ones, you now have the time. Plus, we all seem to have more energy whilst it is still daylight.
- *Use your home.* Invite friends in instead of going out for the evening. Everyone's home looks better when the weather is cooperating. Host that cocktail or dinner party that you have been putting off for so long. Have a garden party or an outdoor Sunday brunch. Summer is a wonderfully social time and what better place to enjoy it than your own home?
- *Get away.* Spend some time in the countryside. The English countryside is absolutely gorgeous this time of year. The beauty of Britain is that you never have to go very far to be in the country. Drive, walk, cycle or tour the local villages. There is so much to experience just a short journey from wherever you may be. Drink it in while you can, for we all know, it won't last forever. ■