

Toy stores offer 1 million ways to get soaked

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On a more prosaic plane, you have the hordes of adults and children who stay cool in humid weather via the use of the traditional little plastic swimming pool in the back yard, along with umbrella-covered sand boxes and your tried-and-true garden hose.

"I keep cool by staying as wet for as long as I can," says Ana Vermeulen, 6. "I also fan myself cool."

She produces a hand fan and proceeds to wave it back and forth in front of her face while blinking in a somewhat coquettish manner.

"I keep cool by swimming in lakes and stuff," says seven-year-old Maury Hibloom as he prepares to step into a plastic swimming pool in his back yard.

"When it's too hot, I need to be in water."

His brother, Natan, 5, "swims every day and I play games in the shade."

Indeed, back yard cooling has become so popular that the little inflatable pool has evolved into this summer's hottest trend—the big inflatable pool.

It's just like the kiddie wading pool, but it's family size. And this summer, you don't even have to go to the trouble of filling it—the rain will do that for you.

Toys R Us at Upper Canada Mall in Newmarket is also in the "cool" business for kids from tiny tot ages and up.

"We have super soaker water guns, which range in price from \$20 to \$80," says a store spokesperson.

"They are a bigger, pretty high-powered gun, which means you get more wet."

If you're really into shooting people with lots of water you can purchase the kind that have large water holding tanks, which you can strap to your back.

Sprinklers are also great for fending off heat waves.

"There are all kinds of sprinklers," the spokesperson says. "There are the kinds you can stick in the ground, attach a hose and they spray around with the

force of the hose."

Prices for sprinklers range from \$7 up to \$30.

Another joy for the young are pool noodles, which are styrofoam tubes five or six feet in length.

"The kids play with them in pools or at the beach," the spokesperson adds. "They can lie on them or play swords with them."

Mothers also have methods of keeping their cool.

"When it's really hot I try to relax mentally and physically," Linda Pretotto says. "I embrace the weather, hot or cold."

Pretotto has also come to a somewhat dubious compromise on whether to use air conditioning in her home or just the open-window concept.

AIR CONDITIONING

On a really humid day, she turns the air conditioning on and opens the windows.

"When my husband comes home, he yells at me."

Marian Senchuk, who grew up in Toronto during the 1930s, remembers her mother combating the heat in her kitchen with the use of a small electric fan.

Hand-held fans were also an important source of "cool" in Senchuk's world.

"My mother had lots of pretty fans, which were sent to her by my father, who was serving overseas in the First World War."

Many a warm evening was spent on the front porch with a waving fan along for additional comfort.

Not surprisingly, the dog days of summer leave the canine set with their tongues hanging out as well.

"You should always keep your pets in a cool place just like you keep yourself," advises Alissa Macneish of Pet Valu in Richmond Hill.

Some of her cooling-off suggestions include having sunblock tops over dog runs, kiddy pools for dogs who can lie

down in the water and Kong toys that can be filled with water and frozen.

"The dog chews on the toy while the melting ice keeps him cool," she says assuredly.

Also available is a contraption called Mr. Pet, which features five evenly-spaced nozzles along an eight-foot line. These release a steady stream of spray when hooked up to a back yard hose.

Leaving the animal kingdom, the journey into "cool" concludes with some pithy words from Dennis Perks.

"A great way to keep cool in the summer," he says, "is to arrange a water pistol fight in your back yard and get the neighbours involved."

"We all get our water guns and out we go running around and getting wet."

An even better way to ride out a heat wave, he says, is to adjourn to a local pub that's air-conditioned and have a cold pint. That will keep you cool for awhile."

Amen.



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