

How to make a cool bed in hot weather

August nights are hotter than stars. They make fans swirl like skirts at a square dance, and bed covers fly off like candy wrappers on Halloween.

August nights are so hot, they make us sleep like starfish. The dogs leave their plush beds to sprawl on cool tile. I've been tempted to join them, but instead I went in search of other cool ways to get through these summer nights.

Which is why, when I learned about a summer sale on Belgian linen sheets, I tuned in. I had never slept on linen sheets, but I'd heard from sheet aficionados, ladies whose lives are more luxurious than mine, about their virtues: light, airy, breathable, absorbent, soft yet durable.

Although I did know that linen is an ideal summertime fabric for clothes, whether it is also the ideal fabric to sleep with was an issue I needed to put to bed.

I ordered a set of linen sheets (in cornflower blue) from Riley Home, a bed and bath company based in New York. Even on summer sale, they weren't cheap, but I've lived long enough to know what not to pinch pennies on: steak knives, perfume, sheets, and bras.

While I waited for my linen sheets to arrive, I called Allyson Dalie, director of product development for Riley Home, to find out whether all the fuss over linen sheets (and their price) was justified, and to find out whether she had any more tips on how to make a cool bed in hot weather.

Yes, I know we can crank up the air conditioning, but let's not waste the energy. In other words, my friends, if your bed in August is the same as it is in January — covered with a thick down comforter, dark wool blankets, and heavy sheets — you need to change more than your thermostat.

"When building your bed



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in summer," Dalie said, "think winter in reverse." In cooler months, most of us want thick bedding to keep the warm in and the cold out; in summer we want the warm out and the cool in. Here are four ways to make a cool bed in hot weather:

- **Put away the duvet.**

The first step to a cooler bed is to store the heavy, down duvet or comforter in the armoire or blanket chest until fall. Replace it with an all-cotton or linen quilt or coverlet. I like my white Heritage cotton inside and out quilt from Boll and Branch, which adds just enough weight without bulk.

- **Cool it on color.** Dark colors not only look hot, they *are* hotter, because they absorb more heat.

Remove bedding in dark colors like rust, navy, charcoal and brown, and replace it with a lighter palette of breezy pastels and white.

- **Change the sheets.**

While storing your heavy comforter and dark blankets, put away other dense bedding like flannel or heavyweight sheets. In summer, you want sheets that are light, breathable and absorbent.

"The breathe is in the weave," Dalie said.

Because judging how a sheet breathes can be hard by just looking at it, get to know the basic properties of the following common sheet fabrics:

- **Linen.** Derived from the flax plant, linen is the most breathable sheet fabric.



Summer slumber — Linen sheets, like those pictured here, are a summertime favorite, because they are light and breathe. They cost more than cotton sheets, because of the labor involved in harvesting and processing flax, and not everyone likes their texture. Photo courtesy of rileyhome.com

"Linen is a natural temperature regulator," Dalie said, "so lends itself to a cooler sleep. If you are a hot sleeper and your partner is not, it can work for you both."

However, not everyone loves the feel of linen. It has a rougher texture, and is not as smooth as cotton, though it does soften with age and washing.

My new linen sheets are gossamer light, which I love, but I agree, their slightly gritty texture will take some getting used to. Before you invest in a whole set, consider trying just a top sheet first. You can also mix, and put a linen top sheet over a cotton, fitted sheet.

- **Cotton.** The coolest-sleeping cotton sheets are percale, said Dalie. "Because sateen cotton is less breathable, they are the sheets you want in colder months."

Percale and sateen use the same cotton. The difference is the weave. Picture a loom with all the threads

running up and down evenly. Now going across you weave a thread over four and under one. That is a sateen weave. Sateen feels softer, is more pliable, and looks shinier.

A percale weave runs the thread over one under one. This makes a tighter, stiffer, crisper fabric. Percale keeps you cooler, because it doesn't settle over you, but, rather, makes little tents, which allow more air to circulate.

- **Bamboo.** Made from long grasses, bamboo sheets are getting more popular, because they're sustainable.

"They are not as breathable as percale, but are cooler than sateen," Dalie said.

Other botanicals making their way into sheets include Tencel (made from eucalyptus) and Modal (made from beech trees).

- **Polyester.** Avoid it. "You never hear anyone say I love my polyester sheets," Dalie said. Sleep with only natural fabrics.

All the above fabrics are

better than any synthetic or synthetic blend.

- **Use lighter layers.**

"Layering is not just for looks, it's for function," Dalie said.

Because many summer sleepers want to feel the weight of a cover but not the heat, the solution is light, breathable layers.

Combine a light top sheet, a light blanket, and a cotton or linen quilt or coverlet until you find the right combination. Start with one or two layers and have a third at the foot of the bed ready to pull up if you cool down.

If that doesn't work, you can always sleep on the tile.

Syndicated columnist Marni Jameson is the author of five home and lifestyle books, including "Downsizing the Family Home — What to Save, What to Let Go" and "Downsizing the Blended Home — When Two Households Become One" (Sterling Publishing, Dec. 2019). Reach her at www.marnijameson.com.