

Why Heatwaves Are A Hidden Threat to Our Wardrobes

Tuesday 23 June, 2026

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As Britain experiences increasingly frequent periods of intense summer heat, many people are discovering that the biggest casualty of a heatwave may not be their garden, but their wardrobe.

From crisp white shirts and silk blouses to favourite summer dresses and tailored jackets, perspiration can quietly cause lasting damage to clothing if it is not dealt with properly.

Yet despite common belief, sweat itself is rarely responsible for the yellow underarm stains that so often appear on garments.

"The staining is caused by the reaction between perspiration and ingredients found in antiperspirants and deodorants," explains Louise, founder of luxury laundry care brand Distinctive Wash.

"Many products designed to reduce sweating contain aluminium compounds. When these combine with perspiration and remain in the fabric, they oxidise over time, causing the familiar yellowing that appears around collars and underarms."

For those investing in quality clothing, prevention is considerably easier than cure.

One of the most common mistakes is applying deodorant after getting dressed. Whether through the buttons of a shirt or beneath a summer dress, excess product often lands on fabric rather than skin, creating the perfect conditions for staining as temperatures rise throughout the day.

"Deodorant should always be applied to clean, dry skin and given time to absorb before dressing," says Louise. "The less product that transfers onto fabric, the better."

Many men who wear tailoring regularly have long relied on lightweight cotton undershirts as a discreet barrier between skin and shirt. Whilst it may seem counterintuitive during warmer weather, a fine cotton or bamboo layer often absorbs moisture before it reaches the outer garment, helping preserve both comfort and fabric.

The question of how frequently clothing should be washed during periods of hot weather is equally important.

Recent years have seen growing encouragement to wash garments less often in an effort to reduce water and energy consumption. Whilst sensible for lightly worn clothing, periods of extreme heat require a more nuanced approach.

"If your clothes are saturated with perspiration and you're heading straight for the shower when you get home, the likelihood is that your clothes need properly refreshing too," Louise says.

"Our skin naturally produces oils and perspiration throughout the day. If these remain in the fibres for extended periods, particularly during warm weather, they can accelerate staining, dull colours and shorten the lifespan of fabrics."

The growing interest in fabric care has coincided with a broader appreciation for fragrance within the home. Increasingly, consumers are seeking laundry products that offer the sophistication of fine perfumery alongside effective cleaning. Fragrance-led brands such as Distinctive Wash have responded with collections that move well beyond the traditional notion of "fresh laundry", drawing instead on the language and craftsmanship of perfume houses.

Their fragrances range from the warm, woody character of Opulence of Amber to the brighter citrus notes of Energising Bergamot and the softer botanical profile of Relaxing Essential Oils. Rather than simply masking odours, these scents become part of a home's atmosphere, lingering subtly on bed linen, towels and clothing long after laundering.

For luxury garments, prompt treatment can make all the difference.

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One simple but often overlooked solution is soaking heavily perspired clothing in cold water immediately after wear.

"If you cannot wash an item straight away, don't simply leave it sitting in a laundry basket for a week," advises Louise. "A sink or bucket of cold water can prevent perspiration and deodorant residues from drying into the fibres and becoming more difficult to remove later."

For existing stains, patience remains key.

The internet is awash with remedies ranging from bicarbonate of soda to specialist stain removers.

"White vinegar can be remarkably effective," she says. "Mix a tablespoon with water, soak the affected area and then launder on a cool wash. Alternatively, soak the stained items overnight with a quality biological detergent. The enzymes get to work straight away to help break down body oils, perspiration and residue trapped within the fabric."

One piece of advice she is particularly keen to stress concerns heat.

"A common mistake is reaching for a hotter wash in the hope of removing a stain more quickly. The problem is that if the stain doesn't lift completely, heat can set it further into the fibres."

The same principle applies to ironing.

"Never iron over a stain that is still visible. You're effectively fixing it permanently into the fabric."

For particularly valuable garments, specialist care remains the safest option.

"If you've invested several hundred pounds in a favourite dress, bespoke shirt or designer piece, a professional cleaner is often worth every penny. They have access to specialist solvents, techniques and fabric knowledge that simply aren't available at home. The cost of expert treatment is usually insignificant compared with the value of the garment itself."

As British summers continue to test both wardrobes and washing routines, caring for clothing properly is becoming less about laundry and more about stewardship.

The best-dressed people have long understood that elegance lies not only in what we buy, but in how we look after it. A beautifully tailored jacket, a favourite linen shirt or a much-loved silk dress can last for years when treated with care.

In an age increasingly defined by fast consumption, there is something quietly luxurious about making beautiful things last.

Company Contact:

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Distinctive Wash Ltd

T. 08002982054

E. Louise@distinctivewash.co.uk

W. <https://Distinctivewash.co.uk>

Additional Contact(s):

07572417424 - mobile

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