

British English: Talking About Heatwaves

Lesson 2 — Level B2

Language Focus

In Lesson 1 you met the basics. This lesson covers the more regional and tabloid-flavoured end of British heatwave talk — the slang, the newspaper headlines, and the jokes people make about a country that's never quite ready for the sun.

Word / Phrase	Meaning	Example
Close	Humid and stuffy, with heavy, still air.	<i>It's been really close today, you can feel a storm brewing.</i>
Cracking the flags	Heat so intense that pavements seem to crack (Northern England).	<i>It was cracking the flags out there, we had to stay in the shade all afternoon.</i>
Baltic	Informally used for freezing cold — the opposite of a heatwave.	<i>Funny how last month everyone was moaning it was baltic, and now it's the opposite problem.</i>
Taps aff	Slang for warm enough to take your top off (Scottish/Northern).	<i>As soon as it hit twenty degrees, it was taps aff for half the lads in the park.</i>
Beer garden weather	Pleasant, warm weather ideal for sitting outside a pub.	<i>Perfect beer garden weather this weekend, we should grab a table early.</i>
Britain sizzles	A tabloid-style headline phrase describing a heatwave gripping the country.	<i>The papers ran with 'Britain sizzles' again this morning, same as every summer.</i>
Hosepipe ban weather	Weather hot and dry enough to trigger water-use restrictions.	<i>It's proper hosepipe ban weather, my garden's basically a desert already.</i>
The country grinds to a halt	A joking exaggeration about transport or daily life struggling in the heat.	<i>Two days of sun and the country grinds to a halt, trains delayed everywhere.</i>
Britain melts	Another tabloid-style phrase describing extreme heat nationwide.	<i>'Britain melts' was the headline again, you'd think we'd never seen sunshine before.</i>

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Reading

Context: Tabloid-style news article

Britain Sizzles: Heatwave Grips the Nation (Again)

Temperatures soared across the country this week, prompting the usual flurry of tabloid headlines and pub garden chatter. “Britain melts,” screamed one front page, while another simply declared conditions officially cracking the flags weather, at least in the north.

Water companies have already warned of hosepipe ban weather, with reservoirs dropping fast after weeks without rain. Meanwhile, beer gardens up and down the country have been packed since lunchtime, with bar staff reporting record demand for cold pints and ice.

In parks and city squares, it didn't take long before it was taps off for half the population, determined to make the most of the sunshine before it disappears again. One commuter, fanning herself on a delayed platform, remarked that it had gone from baltic in April to unbearable within a matter of weeks — typical British weather, she said, with a resigned laugh.

Transport bosses admitted the heat had caused delays on several lines, prompting the now-familiar joke that the country grinds to a halt the moment the sun properly comes out. Even so, forecasters say conditions will remain close and humid overnight, offering little relief before the weekend.

Whether it lasts three days or three weeks, one thing's certain: nobody will stop talking about it.

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1. Odd One Out

In each set, three sentences make sense. One doesn't fit — the heat word is used illogically. Circle the letter of the sentence that is the odd one out.

Context: Pub garden

- A. It was proper beer garden weather, so every table outside filled up within minutes.
- B. It was baltic outside, so the bar staff opened every window to let the heat out.
- C. It was taps aff by early afternoon, with half the garden down to t-shirts.
- D. It felt close and muggy all evening, yet everyone stayed out chasing the last of the sun.

Context: Office car park

- A. It was baltic in the car park, so everyone rushed out in shorts and sandals.
- B. The tarmac was cracking the flags hot, so nobody wanted to walk across without shoes.
- C. It was hosepipe ban weather, so the office plants were left to fend for themselves.
- D. It felt close all afternoon, with barely a breath of wind between the buildings.

Context: Riverside walk

- A. It was taps aff along the river, with joggers stripping down at every opportunity.
- B. The headlines were already calling it 'Britain sizzles,' and the towpath proved it.
- C. It felt baltic by the water, so everyone queued for ice creams to cool down.
- D. It was close and sticky near the riverbank, with midges out in force.

Context: Five-a-side match

- A. It was cracking the flags out on the pitch, so the match was moved to the evening.
- B. It felt baltic pitchside, so players kept their gloves and hats on throughout.
- C. Several players said it was proper hosepipe ban weather, so the pitch was rock hard underfoot.
- D. It was Britain melts weather, according to the ref, who called for extra water breaks.

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2. Multiple Choice

Context: A group chat between friends arranging a pub meet-up

Choose the best word or phrase to complete each message.

1. Let's meet outside, it's proper ____ today.

A) close B) beer garden weather C) baltic

2. Careful cycling over, the roads have been ____ all week.

A) cracking the flags B) taps aff C) hosepipe ban weather

3. Bring a jacket though, it might turn ____ later if that forecast's right.

A) close B) baltic C) taps aff

4. Pub's already busy, seems everyone's had the same idea now it's ____.

A) taps aff B) close C) hosepipe ban weather

5. Did you see the news? They're saying it's officially ____ from Monday, hosepipes banned already.

A) beer garden weather B) hosepipe ban weather C) cracking the flags

6. Knew it wouldn't last, the minute it gets warm ____.

A) Britain sizzles B) taps aff C) the country grinds to a halt

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3. Matching

Match each word or phrase (1–9) to its meaning (A–I). Write the correct letter in the blank.

1. Close ____
2. Cracking the flags ____
3. Baltic ____
4. Taps off ____
5. Beer garden weather ____
6. Britain sizzles ____
7. Hosepipe ban weather ____
8. The country grinds to a halt ____
9. Britain melts ____

-
- A. Pleasant, warm weather ideal for sitting outside a pub
 - B. Another tabloid-style phrase describing extreme heat nationwide
 - C. Humid and stuffy, with heavy, still air
 - D. Weather hot and dry enough to trigger water-use restrictions
 - E. Informally used for freezing cold, the opposite of a heatwave
 - F. A tabloid-style headline phrase describing a heatwave gripping the country
 - G. Heat so intense that pavements seem to crack (Northern England)
 - H. A joking exaggeration about transport or daily life struggling in the heat
 - I. Slang for warm enough to take your top off (Scottish/Northern)

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4. Gap Fill

Context: A diary entry about a heatwave weekend

Saturday

Woke up and it already felt _____ — not a breath of wind anywhere. Spent the morning in the garden, and by midday it was properly _____, so we ended up at the pub just to sit somewhere with other people melting too.

Honestly, it was _____ by two o'clock, half the beer garden had their shirts off within the hour. The papers are already saying “_____,” again, like clockwork.

Walked home along the towpath and the pavement felt like _____, I could barely stand still on it. Mum rang to say the council's bringing in _____ restrictions from next week, apparently the reservoirs are already low.

Funny how two weeks ago everyone was complaining it was _____, and now we're all praying for rain.

Word bank: close • beer garden weather • taps off • Britain sizzles • cracking the flags • hosepipe ban • baltic • Britain melts • the country grinds to a halt

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5. Error Correction

Context: A local radio traffic and weather bulletin

Each sentence below originally used the wrong heat word (shown in capitals). Write the correct word or phrase on the line.

1. The car park tarmac was BALTIC HOT again this afternoon, according to one commuter.

Correction: _____

2. "TAPS SIZZLES," read this morning's headline, as temperatures climbed past thirty degrees.

Correction: _____

3. Council officials confirmed CLOSE BAN measures will come into effect from Monday due to low reservoir levels.

Correction: _____

4. Commuters described the platform as an absolute GARDEN MELTS, with several trains delayed by the heat.

Correction: _____

5. Engineers said the delays proved once again that THE FLAGS GRIND TO A HALT whenever temperatures rise.

Correction: _____

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6. Register Rewrite

Context: A council press release, translated into everyday chat

Each formal sentence needs to be rewritten in everyday spoken English. Circle the letter of the option that captures the same meaning — the others use a heat word that doesn't quite fit.

1. Water suppliers announced restrictions on non-essential outdoor water use due to prolonged dry conditions.

- A) They said it was hosepipe ban weather.
- B) They said it was beer garden weather.
- C) They said it was baltic outside.

2. Commuters reported that road surfaces had become extremely hot underfoot in several areas.

- A) Commuters said it was close outside.
- B) Commuters said it was cracking the flags.
- C) Commuters said it was beer garden weather.

3. Many people took advantage of the mild evening temperatures to remove extra layers of clothing outdoors.

- A) People said it was hosepipe ban weather.
- B) People said it was baltic.
- C) People said it was taps aff.

4. A tabloid newspaper used an exaggerated phrase to describe the nationwide rise in temperature.

- A) The headline read, "Britain sizzles!"
- B) The headline read, "Taps aff again!"
- C) The headline read, "Beer garden weather returns!"

5. Transport officials joked that everyday services always seem to struggle whenever the weather turns unusually warm.

- A) They joked that it's cracking the flags.
- B) They joked that the country grinds to a halt.
- C) They joked that it's close outside.

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6. Residents noted that the atmosphere had felt heavy, humid, and difficult to bear overnight.
- A) Residents said the evenings were baltic.
 - B) Residents said the evenings were beer garden weather.
 - C) Residents said the evenings were close.

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7. Complete the Conversation

Context: Two coworkers chatting during a break

Amy: Are you going anywhere nice after work? Perfect _____ out there.

Priya: Actually thinking the same, fancy the beer garden down the road?

Amy: Definitely, it's been _____ all afternoon in here, the aircon's barely coping.

Priya: Tell me about it. I walked to the shop earlier and the pavement was basically _____.

Amy: Ha, yeah, it was proper _____ by lunchtime, half the office already in shorts.

Priya: Did you see the news though? Officially _____ from next week apparently, no more watering the garden.

Amy: Not surprised, my area's already like a desert. The papers are calling it “_____” again, aren't they.

Priya: Of course they are. Honestly, _____ the second it gets warm, works every single year.

Word bank: beer garden weather • close • cracking the flags • taps off • hosepipe ban • Britain sizzles • the country grinds to a halt • baltic • Britain melts

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TEACHER ANSWER KEY
Do Not Distribute to Students

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In parks and city squares, it didn't take long before it was taps off for half the population, determined to make the most of the sunshine before it disappears again. One commuter, fanning herself on a delayed platform, remarked that it had gone from baltic in April to unbearable within a matter of weeks — typical British weather, she said, with a resigned laugh.

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3. Matching

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2. Cracking the flags (G)
3. Baltic (E)
4. Taps off (I)
5. Beer garden weather (A)
6. Britain sizzles (F)
7. Hosepipe ban weather (D)
8. The country grinds to a halt (H)
9. Britain melts (B)

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Honestly, it was **taps aff** by two o'clock, half the beer garden had their shirts off within the hour. The papers are already saying “**Britain sizzles**,” again, like clockwork.

Walked home along the towpath and the pavement felt like **cracking the flags**, I could barely stand still on it. Mum rang to say the council's bringing in **hosepipe ban** restrictions from next week, apparently the reservoirs are already low.

Funny how two weeks ago everyone was complaining it was **baltic**, and now we're all praying for rain.

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Correction: Britain melts

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Priya: Of course they are. Honestly, **the country grinds to a halt** the second it gets warm, works every single year.