

# Weather Chat: How to Talk About Rain [B1]

Come gli eschimesi per la neve, i britannici dispongono di un ampio lessico per descrivere la pioggia. Dal vocabolario basico fino alle espressioni idiomatiche più creative, ripassiamo la ricchezza dell'inglese nel momento in cui si aprono le cateratte.



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We all know British people love to talk about the weather and in particular, they enjoy **complaining** about the rain. That's not surprising since, **on average**, they **endure** 199 days of rain every year — that's four days a week! What is surprising is that after the long hot summer of 2022, a lot of Brits wanted their rain back! One reason for this is that a prolonged period of drought can quickly lead to a **hosepipe ban**, which means people lucky enough to have a garden cannot **water** it. We like to think of England as a "green and pleasant land", as the poet William Blake put it, and if there's one thing most Britons can't stand, it's a dry, brown landscape. Our intimate relationship with rain could be the reason there are so many words for wet weather in the English language, and if you're spending any time in the UK, you need to be up to speed. Forget "It's raining cats and dogs".

**Hardly anyone** uses that old-fashioned phrase outside of children's books.

Here are a few more [nuanced](#) terms to help you discuss the rain like a professional!

### **"IT'S TRYING TO RAIN."**

It's a nice weekend morning and you and your British friend have organised a barbecue in the garden. Not long before the guests arrive, [ominous](#) clouds begin [to gather](#). You think you feel a drop or two. This is the point where you [gaze knowledgeably](#) at the sky and say: "Oh dear, it's trying to rain." Rain is not a hundred percent [certain](#) at this point, but if the current climactic conditions continue, it will almost [certainly](#) arrive.

### **"IT'S SPITTING."**

This is when you feel the first consistent drops or [notice](#) several [wet spots](#) on the pavement. "Oh no! It's [spitting](#) with rain!" is what you should say as you run into the garden to collect your washing from the [washing line](#)!

### **"IT'S ONLY DRIZZLING."**

[Drizzle](#) is the very fine rain it's not worth putting your umbrella up for, but which can make you quite wet if you stay in it long enough. The best defence against drizzle is a lightweight, [water](#)proof jacket. Many Brits carry one in their bag during the summer! [Drizzle](#) is a [noun](#) and a verb, so if someone asks you, "Is it raining?" but you can't see any actual drops, just some kind of [misty](#) precipitation, feel free to answer: "No, it's only drizzling."

### **"IT'S A SHOWER."**

A [brief spell](#) of rain that is not too heavy is called a shower. It can last from a few seconds to the time it would take you to have a shower at home. The most [annoying](#) of these is a 'sunshower', when it can be sunny and too warm

for your [water](#)proof jacket, but the rain is still falling quite heavily. Unsurprisingly, sunshowers are frequently accompanied by [rainbows](#).

### **"IT'S POURING DOWN."**

A particularly heavy shower is usually known as a '[downpour](#)'. It can happen quite suddenly, like a [trap door](#) opening in the sky. If you're telling an anecdote about some pleasurable activity that was interrupted by heavy rain, you can say: "I was having a fantastic walk in the countryside with Lucy, when suddenly the heavens opened and it started [pouring down](#)."

### **"IT'S TIPPING DOWN/IT'S BUCKETING DOWN."**

If '[pouring down](#)' isn't quite enough for the prolonged [deluge](#) you wish to describe, you can always opt for "[It's tipping down](#)" or "[It's bucketing down](#)". Just imagine thousands of little [imps emptying buckets](#) of [water](#) onto your head!

### **"IT'S RAINING SIDEWAYS."**

Worse than 'tipping' or 'bucketing' down is torrential rain plus a strong wind. When this happens, we say [it's raining sideways](#). We don't [behave](#) like a tourist and attempt to open an umbrella in these conditions, as it will quickly [turn inside out](#). As every Briton knows, the only thing to do is take out your rain jacket and accept that, after a few minutes, you will probably be [drenched](#) or [soaked through](#), which means very wet indeed!

### **PETRICHOR**

If this leaves you [wondering](#) why British people actually miss rain after a prolonged dry spell, the answer might be found in a relatively new word: 'petrichor'. First [coined](#) by two Australian researchers in the 1960s, the term is a combination of the Greek words 'petra', meaning stone, and 'ichor', which was the fluid that flowed like blood in the veins of the immortals in Greek mythology. Think of a long dry summer, when the earth is arid and

**dusty**. **At long last** the rain comes and **releases** a beautiful fresh smell of **moist soil**. That's petrichor! What you actually smell is a molecule called geosmin, made by the Streptomyces bacteria. Different **soils** contain different combinations and concentrations of bacteria, so each petrichor smell is **slightly** different. Human beings are extremely sensitive to the geosmin molecule, so much so, that it has even been included as an ingredient in several perfumes.

## RAINY IDIOMS

"Right as rain" - This means to be **fit** and healthy again, usually after an illness. A confusing association between wellness and rain has been 'saved' by global warming: imagine a refreshing rain shower after an endless dry spell. "Come rain or shine" - Literally, whatever the weather, or, whatever the circumstances. Even the most **easy-going** people use this idiom with caution: it is a **magnet** for Murphy's Law. "**Saving** for a rainy day" - If you actually manage to put money aside for a rainy day, you save it for a time of necessity or **hardship**, when you might genuinely need it unexpectedly. No **cheating**! "To rain on someone's **parade**" - A **parade** is a happy outdoor occasion, and if you rain on someone's **parade**, you **spoil** their fun. There is an alternative word sometimes used to replace 'rain' that really emphasises the point here. Can you think what it is? "It never rains, but it pours"- Often bad luck seems to attract more bad luck and if you suffer one misfortune, more difficult situations will quickly follow! The silver lining, of course, is that you have the perfect opportunity to use this idiom.

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# Glossary

- **coined** = coniare
- **spoil** = rovinare
- **washing line** = stendino
- **Drizzle** = pioggerellina
- **rainbows** = arcobaleni
- **imps** = diavoletti
- **emptying** = svuotare
- **soaked through** = inzuppato
- **At long last** = alla lunga
- **soil** = terreno
- **endure** = sopportare
- **to gather** = riunirsi
- **annoying** = fastidioso
- **pouring down** = diluviare
- **releases** = rilasciare
- **magnet** = magnete, calamita
- **Saving** = risparmiare
- **nuanced** = ricchi di sfumature
- **certain** = sicura
- **buckets** = secchi
- **wondering** = chiedersi
- **fit** = in forma
- **easy-going** = rilassata
- **cheating** = imbrogliare, barare
- **parade** = sfilata, corteo
- **notice** = notare
- **misty** = nebbioso
- **dusty** = polveroso
- **moist** = umido
- **complaining** = lamentarsi
- **water** = innaffiare
- **gaze** = osservare
- **drenched** = fradicio

- **It's bucketing down** = piove a catinelle
- **turn inside out** = capovolgersi
- **slightly** = leggermente
- **hardship** = avversità
- **hosepipe ban** = divieto di usare la canna dell'acqua
- **brief spell** = breve periodo
- **downpour** = scroscio
- **It's tipping down** = sta piovendo forte
- **trap door** = valvola di fondo
- **behave** = comportarsi
- **on average** = in media
- **knowledgeably** = con cognizione di causa
- **wet spots** = macchie umide
- **noun** = sostantivo
- **it's raining sideways** = piove di traverso
- **Hardly anyone** = quasi nessuno
- **ominous** = sinistro
- **spitting** = sta sputando
- **deluge** = diluvio