

Dew Point: The Number That Tells You How It Feels

By the rock. August 7, 2026. Grounded in National Weather Service definitions.

The short version

The dew point is the temperature the air would need to cool to for its moisture to start condensing. It measures how much water vapor is actually in the air, which is what your skin cares about. Below the mid 50s feels dry, the 60s turn sticky, and anything in the 70s is tropical. Unlike relative humidity, dew point does not change its story every time the temperature moves.

What the number means

Cool a parcel of air and its ability to hold water vapor shrinks. The dew point is the temperature where that shrinking ability finally matches the moisture already present, and condensation begins: dew on grass, fog in valleys, sweat that will not dry. More moisture in the air means a higher dew point. That is the whole trick.

Why it beats relative humidity

Relative humidity compares moisture to what the air could hold at its current temperature, so it swings wildly as the day warms and cools without a single drop of moisture changing. A desert dawn can read 85 percent humidity and feel wonderful; a Gulf Coast afternoon can read 55 percent and feel like soup. Dew point ignores the drama. A dew point of 72 feels like 72 dew point weather at any hour, in any state.



The comfort bands, in degrees Fahrenheit of dew point. This site's own muggy and swamp captions run on exactly these thresholds.

Phoenix versus Miami

Ninety degrees with a dew point of 40 is dry heat: sweat evaporates instantly and cooling works. Ninety with a dew point of 75 shuts the machine down; the air is too full of moisture to accept much more, so sweat sits on the skin and the heat compounds. Same thermometer, different planets. This is also why heat index tables need two inputs, not one.

Reading your own weather

Watch the dew point line in the forecast the way you watch temperature. Falling dew points behind a front mean crisp relief even if the thermometer barely moves. A dew point crossing 70 on a summer

evening promises a sweaty night and fuel for any storms that find the trigger. The air is telling you its plans; dew point is the sentence that matters.

Check your understanding

1. Which number tells you how humid it actually feels outside?

- ☐ A. Relative humidity
- ☐ B. Dew point
- ☐ C. Barometric pressure

2. Why can a desert morning read 85 percent relative humidity and still feel dry?

- ☐ A. The sensor is wrong in deserts
- ☐ B. Cold air holds little moisture, so even near saturation there is not much water present
- ☐ C. Humidity works differently at altitude

3. The dew point is 75. What should you expect?

- ☐ A. Crisp and comfortable
- ☐ B. Tropical, oppressive air where sweat barely evaporates
- ☐ C. Guaranteed rain within the hour

4. The temperature climbs all afternoon while moisture stays the same. What happens to the two numbers?

- ☐ A. Both fall
- ☐ B. Relative humidity falls; dew point holds steady
- ☐ C. Dew point falls; humidity holds steady

5. Fog is most likely when:

- ☐ A. Temperature cools to within a few degrees of the dew point on a calm clear night
- ☐ B. Dew point drops suddenly at midday
- ☐ C. Wind picks up after sunset

Answer key

1. Which number tells you how humid it actually feels outside?

B. Dew point — Dew point measures the actual moisture load. Relative humidity changes with temperature even when moisture does not.

2. Why can a desert morning read 85 percent relative humidity and still feel dry?

B. Cold air holds little moisture, so even near saturation there is not much water present — Relative humidity is relative to temperature. Cool desert dawn air is nearly saturated yet carries little total moisture, which the low dew point reveals.

3. The dew point is 75. What should you expect?

B. Tropical, oppressive air where sweat barely evaporates — Mid 70s dew points are swamp territory: the air is loaded. Storms become likelier, but nothing about it guarantees timing.

4. The temperature climbs all afternoon while moisture stays the same. What happens to the two numbers?

B. Relative humidity falls; dew point holds steady — Dew point tracks actual moisture, which did not change. Relative humidity drops because warmer air could hold more.

5. Fog is most likely when:

A. Temperature cools to within a few degrees of the dew point on a calm clear night — When air cools to its dew point, moisture condenses. Calm, clear nights radiate heat away fastest.

Questions people actually ask

Can the dew point be higher than the temperature?

No. When temperature cools to the dew point the air saturates, and condensation, dew, or fog spends the excess. They can meet; the dew point cannot win.

What dew point causes fog?

Fog forms when temperature and dew point close to within a few degrees, most often on calm clear nights when the ground radiates its heat away.

Why do storms care about dew point?

Moisture is storm fuel. Dew points in the upper 60s and 70s mean energy rich air; give it lift and instability and thunderstorms cash it in.

Does dew point affect winter weather too?

Yes. Dry air with a low dew point can eat snow mid fall through evaporation, and the gap between temperature and dew point helps forecasters judge whether falling snow survives to the ground.