

덥다 vs 뜨겁다 vs 따뜻하다

hot (weather, air) · hot (to the touch) · warm, pleasant

English uses “hot” for both the weather and the coffee; Korean doesn’t. **덥다** is hot air around you, **뜨겁다** is a hot thing you touch, and **따뜻하다** is a pleasant warmth.

■ At a glance

Word	Core meaning	Nuance	Typical pattern
덥다	hot (weather, room, body feeling)	The air around you; usually uncomfortable. ㅁ irregular: 더워요.	날씨가 덥다 방이 덥다
뜨겁다	hot (to the touch)	Food, drinks, water, objects, strong sunlight. ㅁ irregular: 뜨거워요.	물이 뜨겁다 뜨거운 커피
따뜻하다	warm	Pleasantly warm weather, food, clothes; also a warm heart.	날씨가 따뜻하다 따뜻한 옷

■ How they differ

1. **Hot air vs hot things.** 날씨가 더워요 ○ / 날씨가 뜨거워요 ×. 커피가 뜨거워요 ○ / 커피가 더워요 ×. Ask: am I feeling the air, or touching the thing?

2. **따뜻하다 is the comfortable one.** 따뜻하다 is warmth you like: 봄 날씨가 따뜻해요, 따뜻한 차. Once it becomes too much, the weather turns 덥다 and a drink turns 뜨겁다.

3. **“Warm clothes” and “warm heart.”** 따뜻한 옷 ○ / 더운 옷 ×. Only 따뜻하다 is used for people: 마음이 따뜻한 사람 (a warm-hearted person).

4. **Sunlight can be 뜨겁다.** The air is 덥다, but the sun’s heat on your skin is felt like touch: 햇볕이 뜨거워요 (the sun is scorching) is natural.

■ One step further

The cold side follows the same logic: 춥다 (cold air), 차갑다 (cold to the touch), 시원하다 (pleasantly cool). For “it’s getting hot”, add -아/어지다: 날씨가 더워졌어요.

■ Practice

- 한국의 8월은 정말 _____. 35도까지 올라가요.
- 라면이 아주 _____. 입 조심하세요.
- 봄에는 날씨가 _____ 꽃이 많이 피요.
- 에어컨이 고장 나서 사무실이 너무 _____.
- 그 선생님은 마음이 _____ 분이예요.

Answers: 1 더워요 · 2 뜨거워요 · 3 따뜻해서 · 4 더워요 · 5 따뜻한

■ Examples

- 한국의 여름은 아주 더워요.
Summers in Korea are very hot.
- 방이 더워서 창문을 열었어요.
The room was hot, so I opened the window.
- 국이 뜨거우니까 천천히 드세요.
The soup is hot, so eat it slowly.
- 뜨거운 물로 샤워했어요.
I took a shower with hot water.
- 오늘은 바람도 없고 날씨가 따뜻해요.
There’s no wind today and the weather is warm.
- 겨울에는 따뜻한 옷을 입으세요.
Wear warm clothes in winter.

■ Which one fits?

Sentence	덥다	뜨겁다	따뜻하다
오늘은 날씨가 정말 _____. 에어컨 좀 켜 주세요.	◎	×	×
커피가 너무 _____. 조심하세요.	×	◎	△
봄이 되어서 날씨가 _____.	△	×	◎
추운 날에는 _____ 차를 마시고 싶어요.	×	○	◎
친구가 _____ 말로 위로해 줬어요.	×	×	◎

◎ natural ○ possible △ awkward × wrong

■ Watch out

× 커피가 너무 더워요.

○ 커피가 너무 뜨거워요.

English “hot” covers both, but something hot to the touch (food, drinks, water) is 뜨겁다.

× 오늘은 날씨가 뜨거워요.

○ 오늘은 날씨가 더워요.

Hot weather or a hot room is 덥다; 뜨겁다 is for things you touch (햇볕이 뜨거워요 for strong sunlight is fine).

× 겨울에는 더운 옷을 입으세요.

○ 겨울에는 따뜻한 옷을 입으세요.

“Warm clothes” are 따뜻한 옷; 덥다 means uncomfortably hot.