

## Columbus Climate and Notable Weather Events

Columbus, Ohio benefits from a moderate climate, with few weather disasters. Its climate is called continental, which means it does not suffer from great extremes of temperature and precipitation and has four distinct seasons. Climate is determined by recording and studying the long-term weather averages in a particular area.

The average annual temperature in Columbus is 52.8 degrees Fahrenheit. In January, the average temperature is 28.3 degrees. By July, the average temperature is 75.1 degrees. The city receives an average of 39.4 inches of rainfall and 27.7 inches of snowfall annually.

### Columbus, Ohio Weather Records

Record high temperature	106 degrees Fahrenheit	July 14, 1936
Record low temperature	-22 degrees Fahrenheit	January 19, 1994
Record 24-hour rainfall	5.16 inches	July 12-13, 1992
Record snowfall	12.3 inches	April 4, 1987

Columbus is not “Sunshine City.” Annually, it averages 190 cloudy days, 103 partly cloudy days, and only 72 clear days. The reason for the dominant overcast conditions is that Columbus is between two weather tracks – one from central and northwestern Canada and one from the Gulf of Mexico.

Columbus weather is also impacted by the effects of hurricanes and other phenomenon. One phenomenon is El Nino, which means "the child" because it typically occurs around Christmas every two to five years. During El Nino years, Columbus tends to have a mild winter and near normal precipitation. El Nino of 1997-98, brought some of the mildest winter weather in Ohio history.

The year after an El Nino tends to bring dry weather to Columbus during the summer and longer cold snaps and more snowfall during the winter. These are called La Nina winters. The winter of 1995-1996 was a good example of a La Nina winter. Columbus got a near record snowfall of 54.1 inches. It even snowed in April.

Columbus is not immune from weather extremes, whether they are drought and heat, or cold and ice. These occurrences often result in widespread damage to property and agriculture, but thankfully, few deaths. The following are extreme weather events from Columbus history.

### FLOODS

Flooding is the nation’s number one weather-related killer. In Columbus, the Scioto River has a long history of flooding. Yet, no one was prepared for the magnitude of the flood on March 23-27, 1913. The Flood of 1913 remains the most devastating weather disaster in Columbus history. Columbus was cut in half by the floodwaters of the Scioto River, when a levee protecting the west side failed. The rush of floodwaters through railroad underpasses created whirlpools and great rapids that swept away people, animals, homes, and businesses. Nearly 100 people died, most of them living in the low lying areas of Franklinton. Water was as high as 22 feet. Nearly 300 homes and businesses were destroyed

and another 4,071 were damaged. Hundreds of residents clung to rooftops and trees for two days, in freezing weather with no food and water, waiting for rescue. Over 20,000 people were left homeless and an additional 15,000 were living in the second floors of their homes as a result of the flood.

Second in severity was the flood of January 21-24, 1959. Many Columbus streets flooded, and 100 homes were badly damaged. Several thousand evacuees from the flooded areas were cared for in Red Cross shelters.

## **HAILSTORMS**

Columbus experiences hail about twice a year, generally in spring and summer when thunderstorms are more numerous. Fortunately, most hail is small, perhaps pea-sized, and causes no damage except to plants and crops. Hail one inch or more in diameter can cause extensive damage.

On July 9, 1913, a deluge of three inch diameter hail hit south Columbus. Windows on homes, schools, stores, and hospitals were broken by the hundreds. It was said to be the worst hailstorm known up to that time in Columbus history. Again, on May 11, 1980, hail as large as baseballs caused more than \$10 million in damage across southern Franklin County. Severe thunderstorms dropped heavy rain and spread high winds, but it was the large hail that caused most of the destruction. Hail smashed windows in homes, offices, schools, and cars. Aluminum siding was dented and ripped away, awnings collapsed, and roofs were damaged. Hardest hit was the south side of Columbus and nearby cities of Grove City and Reynoldsburg.

## **BLIZZARDS**

Columbus is no stranger to snowfall and winter storms. Indeed, the city has weathered many storms and several blizzards. The blizzard of January 26-27, 1978, remains the worst and deadliest winter storm in Ohio history, with a statewide death toll of 51 people. By the time the great blizzard struck on January 26, it had already been a record-setting month in Columbus. By January 20th, the monthly snowfall at the airport had set a new record of 29.4 inches with a snow depth of 17 inches. It was the most snow on the ground at one time since records began in 1878. During the blizzard, wind gusts were recorded at 69 mph, causing blowing snow, huge drifts, and dangerously low visibility. Temperatures fell to near zero as the blizzard began and remained near 10 degrees throughout the storm. Wind chills were below -50 degrees all day. Widespread wind damage occurred, with thousands of trees and miles of electric and telephone lines blown down. The blizzard caused the most complete disruption of transportation ever known in Ohio.

### **Columbus Blizzards**

January 12, 1918	Severe Statewide Blizzard
December 25, 1935	Christmas Day Blizzard
January 28, 1977	Blizzard of 1977
January 26, 1978	The Great Blizzard

## ICE AND WIND STORMS

Ice storms and damaging winds are not uncommon to Columbus. One of the most damaging ice storms in recent memory occurred on December 23, 2004, resulting in more than 375,000 people in Central Ohio losing their power, some for more than a week. After the storm, extremely cold temperatures, well below zero, kept the ice from melting and caused difficulties for those working to restore power and dangerous conditions for residents without heat in their homes.

Damaging winds occur many times each year in Ohio, usually with minor damage to property and vegetation. One of the most damaging large-scale winds in recent years occurred when the remnants of Hurricane Ike tore through Columbus on September 14, 2008. Wind gusts up to 75 mph toppled trees, with many falling onto houses, businesses, and vehicles. Roofs, canopies, and awnings were shredded. Trees were sprawled across roadways and power lines were blown down. More than 400,000 homes and businesses lost their power, some for over a week.

### What About Tornadoes?

A tornado represents the most concentrated form of atmospheric energy on the planet. It can pack winds of up to 300 miles per hour – the strongest wind on Earth. The most tornado-friendly area in the world is an area referred to as Tornado Alley. Ohio is located at the extreme eastern fringe of Tornado Alley – a region running from just east of the Rockies to the Gulf Coast. Although Columbus is no stranger to tornado watches, tornado touchdowns are uncommon occurrences. More and deadlier tornadoes are found in western and northern Ohio.

When it comes to weather, Columbus residents can count on one thing – it changes. Most of the time, the changes are not too disruptive or extreme. The city has continued to meet its weather challenges, learn from its disasters, and enjoy the spice of four distinct seasons.

### Compiler

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### Sources

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