

What to wear for dinghy sailing - some notes to help new sailors choose the right kit.

We try to give all our “Learn to Sail” trainees good basic advice about what to wear to stay warm and dry. When it comes to buying the right kit for the right conditions, the choices can be bewildering and seemingly endless. What style of Wetsuit? Which manufacturer? Where to buy? You don't have to spend a fortune to sail comfortably, and you do need to have an idea of priorities. There are essentials and “nice to haves”. Get the essentials to start and don't rush your spending decisions on the “nice to haves”.

For both safety and comfort there are 3 basic sailing-specific essentials for dinghy sailing on Lake Ontario: a wet suit, gloves, and water shoes. All other necessary sailing apparel can likely be comprised of re-purposed sports equipment: examples Lycra jogging pants, skiing base layers, baseball caps and out-door hiking clothing. Avoid cotton clothing as it absorbs and holds water.

If you're new to sailing, then make note of what the instructors and other sailors are wearing. No one will mind you asking for their opinions on the suitability of their choices or best places to purchase. If in any doubt, please ask for advice. My general advice is make use of what you already own, and then as you learn more buy what you need. Also if you're not sure or have questions we'll go over all this in more detail during the first class.

The essentials:

PFD (Personal Floatation Device) – All CANSail students are REQUIRED to wear a PFD from the moment they step off of land onto the docks until they return to land. The club has enough PFDs for the entire class but we cannot guarantee that we have a PFD that will fit you perfectly. I recommend that if you are serious about water sports that you consider purchasing your own. Typically the best PFDs for sailing are not overly bulky and have cut outs along the sides that allow unrestricted movement of your arms. However, there is a trade-off, more comfort comes at a cost – less buoyancy and righting ability. I recommend that you read up on PFDs and Lifejackets before you make a purchase. The Red Cross has comprehensible description of PFDs: <http://www.redcross.ca/what-we-do/swimming-and-water-safety/swimming-boating-and-water-safety-tips/lifejackets-and-pfds>

Wetsuit - For warmth and safety in the early and late parts of the sailing season wear a light wetsuit. Good fit is essential – a baggy wetsuit is useless. It's a fallacy that wetsuits work by trapping a layer of water that gets warm next to the skin. Any water conducts heat away from your body. The wetsuit works because of the insulation provided by millions of air bubbles in the neoprene. A good fit, effective seals at ankles, wrists and neck and either a dry (waterproof) zip or effective flaps to

keep the water from sluicing through the zip are probably more important than the thickness of the panels. The original price of a wetsuit will reflect the sophistication of the design, flexibility of the neoprene and the reputation of the brand. A suitable wetsuit need not be expensive.

There are a few options, long or short sleeves and legs. Most people at the club wear shorty wetsuits, something like this:

<http://www.mec.ca/AST/ShopMEC/Paddling/MensWatersportsClothing/NeopreneWetsuits/PRD~5021-533/mec-fusion-shorty-mens.jsp>

Key thing here, don't get up-sold to a thick diving wetsuit. You don't want anything thicker than 5mm. If you get cold easily you might want to consider a long sleeve wetsuit, the downside being that in warmer weather you will overheat in a long sleeve wetsuit. People sometimes develop allergies to neoprene and find it necessary to wear a thin "rash" (anti-rash) under layers.

The other thing to consider is that dinghies are an aggressive environment for neoprene wetsuits, so you should think of wearing layers on top of your wetsuit to both avoid snags, tears and rips, and reduce wind chill.

Gloves - when it comes to gloves, getting something sailing specific is the best bet. Sailing gloves are designed to protect your hands from rope burn and the stand up to a lot of wear and tear. Something like these:

<http://www.westmarine.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/ProductDisplay?productId=566501&catalogId=10001&langId=-1&storeId=11151&storeNum=51066&subdeptNum=51074&classNum=51075>

The missing finger tips are to let you more easily tie knots.

But if you do get cold hands then you might want to look for something a bit more insulated. Fit is the most important consideration: try the gloves on before purchasing and make sure they are snug but comfortable: thicker gloves not pre-shaped to the rope-holding grip position of your fingers may cause forearm cramping.

Water shoes - you'll find yourself wading in to the water when taking the boats in and out, so water shoes are a good idea. There are many different sailing specific shoes, but for a first season go for something simple like these:

<http://www.mec.ca/AST/ShopMEC/Paddling/Footwear/PRD~5021-652/mec-moque-boot-low-unisex.jsp>

"Nice to Haves" – dingy hiking boots, something like these:

<http://www.westmarine.com/mens-dinghy-boots/zhik--260-high-cut-soft-sole-boots-black-gray-5--12121976>

Dingy hiking boots are warmer and more durable than the water shoes described above but are also harder to dry and are destined to be the least pleasant smelling among your sailing gear.

Jacket - When it's cold, wearing just a wetsuit will leave you chilly, to start with any windbreaker will do. If it is really cold then a wool base layer, mid layer fleece top, and a wool hat will make all the difference.

“Nice to Haves” - there are lots of sailing specific outerwear, such as:

<http://www.westmarine.com/mens-dinghy-foul-weather-tops/gill--men-s-pro-dinghy-smock-silver-graphite-s--12056636>

In any outdoor sport layering is the key to comfort. What keeps you warm and

dry - Different fabrics have very different thermal characteristics: cotton absorbs water and is slow to dry making the wearer cold and wet. Polyamide (nylon) keeps you cool and repels water and is quick to dry - typically used in rash vests - originally for wearing under wetsuits but now as a summer top layer for sun protection. Polyester is warm and quick to dry - typically used in fleeces as base or mid layers, usually as a fine "Microfleece" fabric. Polypropylene is hydrophobic so does not absorb any water and feels warm even when wet. It is extremely quick to dry. Typically used in fleeces as base or mid layers and in top-end sailing gear.

You may find the following technical explanation of modern clothing technology interesting: <http://www.musto.com/technology>

Another what to wear guide:

<http://www.apsltd.com/c-8473-what-to-wear-guide-dinghy.aspx>

Other manufacturers are available. They all provide similar explanations, but how their products deliver the benefits differ.

Other important apparel – wool socks, sunglasses, hats with good visors, and sunscreen.

Places to shop in the GTA for your sail gear:

<http://www.mec.ca>

<http://www.westmarine.com>

<http://www.foghmarine.com>

<http://www.riggingshoppe.com/>