

The 8 Most Popular Sneakers of Summer 2017

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The kicks that dominated street style photos, Instagram feeds, and closets this summer



Photo Illustration/Dan Roberts/Getty Images

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It's a hallowed summertime tradition, like grilling hot dogs or finding sand in your shoes two weeks after you've left the beach: each year, pop stars do battle for the unofficial designation of "[song of the summer](#)." But what about the *sneaker* of the summer? Like radio hits, the popularity of certain kicks snowballs during the warmer months, also known as sneaker season (when rain and actual snowballs are at their least sneaker-threatening levels). And this summer, there were eight sneakers that dominated Instagram feeds, street style photos, and the closets of people everywhere. Using our proprietary (and mostly made-up) formula, and factoring in variables like hype, celebrity endorsement, and general popularity, we've ranked them to determine which pair takes the crown as the Sneaker of the Summer.

8. Balenciaga Speed Knit Trainers





Sock-like sneakers are one of the biggest trends of the year: think of them as the ultimate sign of rebellion against traditional lace-up footwear. Mass market options like Adidas NMD City Sock and Nike Sock Dart were big deals this summer (just see below), but for hype-driven customers, the ante-upping version of the style comes from the high-fashion label Balenciaga and its Speed Knit Trainers. The shoes don't have laces and have a rugged, almost boot-like sole, but it's their minimalist black uppers that have made them the ideal complement to the logo-heavy socks and track pants we're seeing everywhere right now.

Since Vetements designer Demna Gvasalia took the reigns at Balenciaga, the brand has been re-invigorated with a buzz that comes hand-in-hand with Gvasalia's knack for clothes that instantly up the clout score of any outfit (see: Vetements' oversized hoodies, Balenciaga's new Bernie Sanders-inspired caps). We don't always approve of the logo-heavy combinations of Adidas track pants and Off-White sneakers that youngsters wear with the Balenciaga Speed Knit Trainers, but it's undeniable that this summer, these sneakers have become a status symbol.

\$595, buy now at [Barneys New York](#)

7. Adidas Yeezy Powerphase "Calabasas"





In 2017, Yeezy Boosts have continued their reign as the most hyped-up brand of kicks on the planet: the shoes claimed five out of the six top spots in terms of pure transactions on the re-seller site GOAT, according to data provided by the site. But it's the retro-inspired Yeezy Powerphase Calabasas—which dropped in May—that became perhaps the only Kanye-designed sneakers ever that regular guys could get their hands on. (You can scoop up pairs for around \$200—just \$80 more than their retail price—on eBay.) The shoes' Richard Simmons-esque '80s design also came at the perfect time, as similar styles from Reebok

were already starting to bubble back into the sneaker consciousness thanks to collaborations with designers like Gosha Rubchinskiy as early as 2015.



Of course, the difference between a Gosha Reebok and a Yeezy Adidas is the Kanye West seal of approval, even though on the Powerphase this was only small, gold text reading "Calabasas" (the Los Angeles suburb where West and his wife Kim Kardashian reside). And as far as Yeezys go, the Powerphases are without a doubt the most wearable and minimal of the sneakers West has so far released, which means guys can actually wear them around town without aggressively stating their allegiance to Yeezus. It also explains why they became a favorite of the undisputed "long tee and skinny jeans" king Scott Disick, who's never met a pair of clean white sneakers (or a Kanye-inspired trend) he didn't love.

\$275, buy now at [Flight Club](#)

6. Nike Air Max Plus





The Air Max Plus first hit shelves in 1998, a time when aggressive, baroque designs were the hottest thing in sneakers. (See: The Ferrari-inspired Air Jordan 14, or the cartoonish Air More Uptempo). But as everything 90s is back in style—like big-ass logos, wide-leg jeans, and over-the-top Gucci—it's natural that a re-released Nike Air Max Plus would become a hit. For street style gods, it turned out to be the perfect pairing for some bigger pants and a Hawaiian shirt, or for channeling 90s-era workout style as [Drake did at Wimbledon](#) a few years back.

Certain colorways of the Air Max Plus have been more hyped up than others, with the more subtle combination of black/blue probably being the most coveted version on the market ([\\$234 on eBay](#)) followed by the OG 1998 light blue version (\$190) and white/orange "Sunburn" version (about \$180). But regardless of the color scheme, the Air Max Plus was the sleeper hit of the season in a year when the Swoosh itself was pushing its OG Air Max 1 and Nike VaporMax way harder. Consider them the "underground" sneaker of summer, even if they weren't quite buzzy enough to claim a higher spot on this list.

\$150, buy now at [Eastbay](#)

5. Nike x Tom Sachs Mars Yard Shoe 2.0





The [Mars Yard Shoe](#)—more or less designed from scratch by Nike and New York City artist Tom Sachs—first debuted in 2012 alongside Sachs' Space Camp exhibit in New York City (a show that saw the artist and his team to scale versions of a Mars Rover among other NASA-inspired pieces). The kicks were only available for purchase at the exhibit and sold out in a few days, but after a few problems arose in the shoe's construction—namely that a space age fabric used on the upper called Vectran ended up ripping after repeated wears—the two parties decided to bring the shoe back this June. But rather than initially drop the kicks online

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and simply allow the masses to flood Nike's servers (though they did do this in July), the first wave in June required hopeful customers to take a ferry to Governor's Island in New York City and complete an obstacle course to buy the limited-edition kicks.

The extra effort required to purchase combined with the fact that were only released in New York meant there weren't many pairs floating around city streets and Grailed listings this summer (and the ones that did asked customers to fork over north of \$1,000). But, as sneakerheads know, the harder it is to cop, the cooler the kicks, and by that metric, the Mars Yard Shoe was without a doubt one of the coolest sneakers of summer 2017. In addition to their rarity, the shoe's unique design—featuring a tan mesh and suede upper, a Red Nike Swoosh, and a Nike field boot sole—also meant these kicks could be spotted from a mile (or a planet) away.

\$1,250, buy now at [Flight Club](#)

4. Vans Old Skool





Thanks to the rise of skate style combined with our increasingly casual office culture (FYI: Shorts are still officially banned from the GQ offices), Vans Old Skools became the official "cool guy" sneaker of GQHQ last year—and seemingly the entire menswear world [shortly thereafter](#). Because they were so popular last year, we thought the Old Skool trend would fizzle out before this summer. Goodness, were we wrong. The Old Skool trend just kept getting bigger and bigger this year, and reached a tipping point when a knees-down photo of GQ staffers rocking them [became a viral meme](#).



What makes the Vans Old Skool so popular amongst Rick Owens-wearing high-fashion types and average bros alike is that they've got legitimate credibility as one of the all-time cool skateboarding sneakers, but they're also available everywhere, affordable, and look great with everything (unlike the hyper-specific styling usually required of something like a Yeezy Boost or Air Max Plus). It's hard to say if the Old Skool will be quite this white-hot in 2018 , but the shoes have been around since the 70s—so they're not going anywhere.

\$60, buy now at [Foot Locker](#)

3. Gucci Ace Sneaker





Since appointing Creative Director Alessandro Michele in 2014, Gucci has been [white-hot](#). Michele's over-the-top use of print, pattern, and graphics were the necessary antidote to years of industry-wide minimalism, but getting in on the fun can require a thick wallet—and the confidence to wear an embroidered grandma cardigan. The Gucci Ace sneaker became a sort of cheat code this summer: a way to get a dose of Gucci vibes without having to rock a floral silk shirt with a tiger on it.



Frank Ocean's "Biking" album cover

They're a clean, white tennis sneaker that's got the added bonus of a Gucci logo and embroidery (often of snakes and lions), which we imagine made them appealing to a wider range of people. They also became favorites of taste gods like Frank Ocean, who wore the kicks on not one but two album covers this summer (for his singles "Chanel" and "Biking"), and celebs like Louis Tomlinson, Rick Ross, and Conor McGregor were all spotted wearing the Gucci Ace sneakers this summer. Gucci's insane popularity right now meant the Ace sneakers were kind of always destined to be summer favorites—and the celebrity endorsements pushed the pair up the hype ladder.

\$640, buy now at [Gucci](#)

2. Adidas NMD





The Adidas NMD first debuted in late 2014 as the first-ever Adidas lifestyle sneaker to feature Boost technology—the foam-like sole that has revolutionized sneaker comfort for a new generation of Adidas fans. Since then, the NMD range has expanded to include an entire family of kicks, like the laceless City Sock, the sporty XR1, and even a collection of NMDs designed by Pharrell Williams dubbed the "Hu." Despite so many NMDs dropping this year—including a re-release of the original black, blue, and red NMD R1—week after week this summer, kids have lined up to cop the latest NMD drop—and that's a big deal. These kicks

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have become Adidas's bread and butter in terms of getting their kicks on young, hungry sneaker collectors.

Unlike a Yeezy Boost, NMDs are, other than Pharrell's own version, not attached to any one celebrity. In other words, they're cool because they're...just *cool*. Their modern styling (a sleek Primeknit upper atop that cushy, white Boost sole), comfort, and relative affordability (the NMD R1 goes for \$130) mean they represent the future of Adidas sneakers at a time when retro styles like Adidas's Superstar are still the most popular shoes on the market.

\$140, buy now at [Adidas](#)

1. Nike VaporMax





The sneaker world won't stop buzzing about Adidas's success these days, but it's a Nike number that we're crowning the sneaker of summer. The [Nike VaporMax](#) was released initially back in March, to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the Air Max 1 that started it all, but the shoes signaled a radical evolution for the Air Max family—and for Nike in general. Versions made with Comme Des Garçons and Off-White have generated the most buzz amongst fashion-forward types, but the reason they've been a hit with average customers is they look like the first Nike sneaker in a while that suggests a vision of the future. (Nike's self-lacing

kicks are cool, but at \$700 retail and a lot more on the aftermarket, they're still kind of just a concept car.)

Just look at the things: The VaporMax boasts a super-lightweight Flyknit upper on top of a multi-pronged Air Bubble system that makes the wearer look like they're walking on multiple sets of tires. To date, they have been released in over ten colorways, a signal of just how badly customers can't wait to scoop up the VaporMax in all of its wacky iterations. Technically the VaporMax is a running shoe, but most have opted to rock them more casually (i.e., paired with some loose, Dickie-inspired trousers—or actual Dickies). They were undeniably the one sneaker this summer that hit on all cylinders—innovation, style, and hype. So even though Adidas is gaining some ground on Nike, the VaporMax was exactly what the Swoosh needed to steal the conversation back. In our age of Sneaker Wars, that's what it takes to be Sneaker of the Summer.

\$190, available at [Finish Line](#)

Everything You Need to Know About the Air Jordan 1