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Sizzle through the season with a good beach read

By Lillia Callum-Penso • Staff writer • June 13, 2010

Imagine it: A rocking chair on the front porch and a glass of **sweet** lemonade within reach, or maybe a beach chair on the sand and an iced cold beer nestled nearby.

Summer is here. Time to relax, enjoy the outdoors and read. So get thee to a bookstore or library; there are plenty books to choose from.

Just like summer movies, summer books tend to center on fantasy and fiction, says Sonja Pruitt, community relations manager for Barnes & Noble. People need a good book "to get lost in."

Summer reads tend to be more light hearted, quicker reads, Pruitt says. Just like your **food** and your clothes, you don't want anything too heavy, and a number of new books fit that bill. Stephanie Meyers is back on the scene with "The Short Second Life of Bree Tanner: An Eclipse Novella." The book is told from the point of view of Bree, a character introduced in the "Twilight" series' "Eclipse."

"People don't usually release really heavy literary stuff in the summer," says Jill Hendrix, owner of Fiction Addiction in Greenville. "I think it should be easy to get in to; it should be a quick read that doesn't necessarily require you to go back and reread passages. I like to do just fun books. I think humorous books do well in the summer."

One of Hendrix's favorites is Janet Evanovich's humorous "Sizzlin' Sixteen." The book follows New Jersey bounty hunter Stephanie Plum. "Jersey Shore" it ain't, she says, but laugh out loud you will.

Another popular theme that emerges come summer is the beach. And there's everything from chick lit and romance novels to historical fiction. If you're looking for something timely and compelling, Hendrix recommends Mary Alice Monroe's new "Last Light Over Carolina." The novel is about South Carolina's shrimping industry and, given the current attention focused on the **oil spill** in the Gulf of Mexico, it is also topical, Hendrix says.

Along those same lines but more ocean-centered is "The Wave Watcher's Companion" by Gavin Pretor-Pinney, set for July release. The nonfiction book covers everything wave related, from waves that sink ships to the best waves for surfing to microwaves to the stadium wave. You'll never look at waves in the same way.

Though fiction tends to dominate summer releases, the self-improvement, inspirational genre is still going strong, says Pruitt. Books like Peter Buffett's "What You Make It," offer up life philosophies that are entertaining vacation reads. The son of billionaire investor Warren Buffett discusses the ethics and mores that shaped his upbringing and makes a case for living a fulfilling life.

Along those same lines, this summer might be a great time to check out Elizabeth Gilbert's "Eat, Pray, Love." The humorous memoir that recounts the author's world travels post divorce has been a hit since it was released in 2007. This summer's scheduled release of the movie version starring Julia Roberts makes now a great time to add the book to your list, says Hendrix.

Of course, if you crave something just a little bit different, summer is a great time to read "off the beaten track," says Margaret Oakes, professor of English at Furman University. She prefers to see what's most popular and find books that are similar but under the radar. For example, instead of reading Steig Larson's popular "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo" or "The Girl who Kicked the Hornet's Nest," Oakes suggests Henning Menkell, whose Kurt

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Wallander books offer suspense and good writing.

"Sometimes you should pick up a book and not know what's in it," Oakes says.

And parents in search of books to read to their kids might find enjoyment for themselves, too, in Neil Gaiman's "The Graveyard Book." The story that follows a boy who is raised in a graveyard by ghosts is not only interesting but witty with terrific dialogue, says Oakes.

Choices abound for those who are looking for stories that hit closer to home. Pat Conroy's, "South of Broad," which takes place in 1960s Charleston just came out in paperback, making it easily portable in a carry-on bag. And Atlanta-based author Karen White's "On Folly Beach" was also just released in paperback and weaves together two stories, one about a woman who's husband died in Iraq/Afghanistan and a WWII mystery, both of which take place on a South Carolina beach.

Summer is also a great time to get caught up on the classics, so you may want to take a look at the list your high school student has. This summer marks the 50th anniversary of Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird," so grab your old copy, or a new one, and dive in – or sit on the shore.

"Even people who have electronic readers like the Kindle or the Nook often find it's safer to take a physical book with them to the beach than risk their e-reader in the sand and water," Hendrix says.

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Quick, light reads are perfect for summer reading. (HEIDI HEILBRUNN/Staff)

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