

REAL DEAL



What is that?

Is it a grain, a seed or superfood? Get all the facts about quinoa, **K2**

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THE OTTAWA CITIZEN, SECTION K

Comfort & style



Gizeh by Birkenstock



Mephisto Agacia slides

Forget ugly orthopedic shoes. Outfit your feet this summer in sandals that combine good support with funky designer looks.

MARIE-DANIELLE SMITH

Are we such slaves to fashion that we opt for sparkly flip-flops and six-inch wedges over ultra-comfortable sports sandals? Sorry, ladies, but when it comes to footwear, beauty shouldn't have to mean pain. As the weather gets warmer, toes are coming out of hibernation. Finding sandals that marry comfort with style might not be as difficult as you think.

A number of brands offer sandals that are orthopedically correct, feel comfortable and won't cause knee and back pain often associated with wearing badly made shoes. Some are recommended for people with particular foot ailments, but guess what? They look good, too.

Here's a guide to some of the major feet-friendly brands:

BIRKENSTOCKS

Ian Colquhoun, owner of Soléa on Carling Avenue, says this was the first noted sandal that had a therapeutically shaped footbed that properly supports your foot and is naturally contoured. At the same time, it's comfortable because the cork footbed moulds to your foot. Ottawa podiatrist Derek Gilmer says Birkenstocks feature an aggressive arch support that can help people with fallen arches, but he urges shoppers to try on many different brands to make sure the shoes feel comfortable before making a decision.

Who wears them: Birkenstocks are universal in their demographic, says Colquhoun. "It's not just middle-aged hippies anymore. You have mothers who are coming in wearing them and they're bringing their daughter in to get her first pair."

Where to buy: Soléa, Letellier, Glebe Trotters, Soft Moc, The Shoe Inn, Town Shoes, Foot Solutions, Apple Saddlery and Byward Bargain

Cost: Synthetic straps at \$80 to \$100; leather straps at \$115 to \$150

MEPHISTO

Jean Letellier, fourth-generation owner of the Letellier shoe store on Rideau Street, says Mephisto is a France-based company that's been making shoes for a long time. They are made from high-quality materials and have a rubber sole, whereas cheaper shoes use plastic. Rubber absorbs shock better than plastic, making this a more comfortable and longer-lasting walking shoe.

Who wears them: Like Birkenstocks, Mephisto shoes are heavy on arch

support. Designs will appeal to a wide demographic, says Colquhoun, but people tend to buy more as they reach their 30s and up.

Where to buy: Letellier, Armstrong & Richardson, Soléa, Chaussures Regional, Pouliot Gatineau, Craig Shoes and Foot Solutions

Cost: From \$150 to just under \$300

THINK!

Austrian-made Think! shoes are made from all-natural dyes and footbeds are made out of cork, says Letellier. Most of the materials used to manufacture the shoes are biodegradable and chemical-free.

Who wears them: People in their 30s, 40s and up tend to look for this brand. It's also a favourite for those who support environmentally-friendly practices.

Where to buy: Soléa, Letellier, Armstrong & Richardson and Foot Solutions

Cost: From \$150 to \$250

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Colourful, strappy trio from Think!



Metallic Mephistos rule Karen Turner's wardrobe after she suffered from painful plantar fasciitis.



Soothing the sole

A pair of flashy red Mephistos brings much-needed relief to intense heel pain



KAREN TURNER

You can't put a price on healthy feet — or so I quickly discovered last summer when I developed plantar fasciitis.

Hobbling into the doctor's office with excruciating heel pain — with every step, it felt like I was

being jabbed with razor-sharp needles — I was gobsmacked to learn I was suffering from a common sports injury. "But I'm not sporty," I winced.

Truth is the thick band of tissue, a.k.a. plantar fascia, that extends along the sole of the foot from the heel to the toes and supports the arch can become overstressed for many reasons: obesity, repetitive movements such as running, standing on your feet for extended hours or wearing shoes with little or no arch support. Small tears in the tissue occur, causing inflammation and intense pain.

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Sandals: Comfort and style

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DANSKO

Dansko is known for its rocker sole, or a sole that has a unique curve relieving pressure from the front of the foot, says Gilmer. This encourages a "healthy walking motion," says Colquhoun.

Who wears them: People who have problems with their toes or the front part of their foot can benefit from the unique sole.

Where to buy: Soléa, The Expedition Shoppe, Glebe Trotters, Armstrong & Richardson, The Safety House, Hunt Club Foot Care, Burns Orthomedical Supplies and Boutique Burro Borracho

Cost: \$135 to \$165

FINN COMFORT

Finn Comfort are German-made shoes that feature a removable footbed that can be replaced by custom orthotics. The footbed is contoured and straps are lined with leather and easier on the feet. Straps are also easy to tie and well-suited to people with arthritis. Some models have a slightly raised heel.

Who wears them: People with custom orthotics find this brand



Cork wedges from Clarks



Salma sandals from Josef Seibel

popular. The original footbed has good built-in arch support, says Gilmer. The slight heel and cushioning in the footbed take pressure off the heel, making it a good choice for people with plantar fasciitis, he says.

Where to buy: Soléa, Letellier, Foot Solutions, Walking Mobility Clinics and Bio Ped Foot Care Centre

Cost: \$200 to \$280

Other recommended brands include Josef Seibel, which sells European Comfort Shoes with a removable footbed for custom orthotics, Naturalizers and Italian-made Tender Tootsies. Clarks and Ecco also offer a well-made, high-quality shoe.

David Greenberg, a doctor of podiatric medicine, says he doesn't recommend specific brands because everybody's feet are different. He says you're better to experiment and try on lots of different shoes.

As a rule, though, flip-flops should be avoided if you're doing a lot of walking, he says.

"They're called flip-flops for a reason. People flip and flop," he says.

Letellier says with flip-flops and

sole-less ballerina flats "fashion is ruining people's feet."

He says 15 years ago, fashion wasn't as important as it is now. The upside is it means "comfort brands" are incorporating fashion trends in their designs.

So, you can walk comfortably and blister-free while feeling fashionable at the same time.