Spicy Food and Tea: What to Pair

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tea and spicy food, in summary:** Spicy-food-and-tea pairing follows two approaches; match-spice-with-spice (masala chai+curry) or cool-the-fire (jasmine+Thai); a deliberate practice.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in March 2026.

Tea and spicy food is the pairing British takeaway culture has perfected, chai with curry, mint with spicy Asian food, cooling green tea with chilli hot dishes. Different spicy traditions want different teas; understanding the principles helps with everything from a Friday night curry to a Bombay night home dinner.

The two pairing approaches

Match the spice (complement)

Indian curry + chai. Same spice family doubles the warming character. Cardamom in food + cardamom in tea.

Cool the spice (contrast)

Spicy Thai food + green tea. Tea cleanses palate between bites; the cooling cuts through chilli heat.

The major spicy cuisine pairings

Indian curry + masala chai

The traditional pairing. Pan brewed chai before the meal and after. The spice families align.

Indian curry + green tea

An alternative: cooling and palate clearing. Useful for very hot curries.

Thai food + jasmine green tea

Cooling and aromatic. Cuts through heat without overwhelming the food.

Sichuan Chinese + premium oolong

Sichuan's complex peppercorn chilli heat + oolong's complex aromatics = match made for tasting.

Mexican / Tex Mex + Mexican style hibiscus

Iced hibiscus tea (agua de Jamaica) + spicy Mexican food. Traditional pairing.

Korean food + green tea or barley tea

Light teas cut through fermented spicy character of kimchi and gochujang.

Vietnamese + jasmine green tea or oolong

Aromatic teas complement Vietnamese cuisine's herb heavy character.

Moroccan / Middle Eastern + mint tea

Sweet mint tea + spiced tagine = traditional pairing.

Caribbean spicy + soursop or sorrel tea

Caribbean food + Caribbean tea traditions.

Why mint helps with spicy food

Menthol in mint triggers cold sensing receptors (TRPM8), creating actual cooling sensation that counters chilli's hot sensation (which triggers heat sensing TRPV1 receptors). This is biological, not just psychological.

Why green tea works with spicy food

- Clearing the palate between bites
- L theanine provides a quiet counterpoint to spice excitement
- Light body doesn't compete with food
- Catechins have mild astringent character that refreshes

Why chai works with Indian food

- Same spice palette (cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, cloves)
- Heritage pairing, evolved together
- Black tea body holds up to rich curries
- Milk and sugar version provides sweet break from spicy heat

What NOT to pair with spicy food

Strong black tea (Yorkshire) with hot curry

Tannins amplify chilli heat sensation. Use chai or green tea instead.

Earl Grey with garlicky/oniony curry

Bergamot competes with garlic; doesn't complement.

Lapsang Souchong with most spicy food

Smoke + spice = clash unless food is specifically smoked and spiced.

Chamomile with anything spicy

Too delicate; gets lost.

Specific spicy food pairings

Spicy food	Best tea
Indian curry (mild medium)	Masala chai
Indian curry (very hot)	Green tea or chai latte (milk softens)
Thai green curry	Jasmine green or Bao Zhong oolong
Thai red curry	Jasmine green tea
Sichuan dishes	Premium oolong or pu erh
Korean BBQ / kimchi	Green tea or barley tea
Vietnamese pho	Jasmine green
Mexican (chilli led)	Hibiscus iced tea
Caribbean jerk	Soursop tea or sorrel
North African / Moroccan	Moroccan mint tea
Pakistani / Bangladeshi	Strong masala chai

The British curry and chai tradition

The UK's "Friday curry" is part of British culture, Indian/Bangladeshi food adapted for British tastes. Pan brewed chai before or after the meal is the natural pairing. Some British curry houses serve chai as the standard accompaniment.

Brewing for spicy food

Chai for Indian food

Pan brew with whole spices for richest cup. Pre meal or post meal; less commonly during the meal itself.

Green tea for Asian food

Brew at 75-80°C; multiple infusions during the meal. Refreshes palate between dishes.

Mint for hot food

Iced mint tea works particularly well, cooling temperature + cooling menthol.

The "milk softens chilli" approach

Milk based teas (chai latte, milky English Breakfast) actually do reduce chilli's hot sensation through fat binding. Capsaicin (chilli's hot compound) is fat soluble, milk fat binds and dilutes the heat. Useful for British drinkers who find some Indian food too hot.

FAQ

Best tea with curry? Masala chai for Indian curry. Green tea for Thai or other Asian.

Does mint help with spicy food? Yes, menthol's cooling sensation actually counters chilli heat biologically.

Should I drink tea during the meal? Yes, especially for green tea or mint tea, refreshes palate.

Worst pairing? Strong British black tea with very hot curry, tannins amplify heat.

Caffeine free option? Mint tea or rooibos chai for spicy food without caffeine.

Curator's note: chai with curry is the British takeaway culture's quiet wisdom. The pairing beats the lager many drinkers default to. Worth trying next Friday. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

tea and spicy food pairings at a glance

Cuisine	The tea pairing
Indian curry	Masala chai; match-spice-with-spice approach
Thai curry	Jasmine green; cool-the-fire approach
Sichuan cuisine	Pu-erh shou; anchor-the-heat with earthy depth
Korean barbecue	Smoky Lapsang Souchong; smoke-meets-grill
Mexican spicy	Mint or peppermint tea; cooling and refreshing
British curry	Strong builder tea with milk; the UK tradition
Sushi/sashimi	Hojicha; gentle-and-cleansing
The tip	Match spice level; light food = light tea, bold food = bold tea

More on tea pairing

- Tea and food pairing
- Masala chai
- Chai tea
- Jasmine tea

Easy picks alongside this one: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. More in the tea shop; curry night teas ship free in the UK above £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · With a curry, compare teas by price per cup, not pack price. Loose leaf usually wins,

though bags sometimes hold up beside a takeaway.

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/