Steep Times by Tea Family

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Steep times, in summary:** Steep times vary by family; black 3-5 min boiling, green 1-2 min at 70-80C, white 2-3 min at 75-85C, herbal 5-10 min; mind time and temperature.

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

Steep time matters more than most British tea drinkers realise. Black tea: 3-5 minutes. Green tea: 1-2 minutes. White tea: 4-5 minutes. Oolong: 2-4 minutes (multi infusion). Herbal: 5-10 minutes. Get the time wrong and you've wasted the leaf, too short and the tea is thin and weak; too long and it's bitter and astringent. The kettle and quick bag approach loses 30% of what good tea offers.

Why steep time matters

Steeping is extraction. The hot water pulls compounds from the leaf in stages:

- **0-30 seconds:** Aromatic volatile compounds, flavour and aroma.
- **30 seconds, 2 minutes:** Caffeine and amino acids (L theanine).
- **2-5 minutes:** Catechins, polyphenols, fuller body.
- **5+ minutes:** Tannins (astringency, bitterness).

The right steep time stops at full flavour but before excessive tannin. Different teas have different optimal points.

Black tea steep times

Standard British black (Yorkshire, Tetley, PG Tips)

3-4 minutes for full strength. 4-5 minutes for very strong "builder's tea." 2 minutes for lighter cup.

Premium black (Yorkshire Gold, Earl Grey, Darjeeling)

3-4 minutes. Don't over steep, premium black tea reveals complexity that bitterness will mask.

Assam

4-5 minutes for the full malty character. Stand up to milk and sugar.

Darjeeling

3 minutes, the delicate muscatel notes are masked by over steeping.

Ceylon

3-4 minutes.

Smoky black (Lapsang Souchong)

3-5 minutes. The smoke holds up well to longer steeping.

Green tea steep times

Standard green (Twinings Pure Green, Clipper)

1-2 minutes at 70-80°C. NOT longer, green tea over steeps quickly to bitterness.

Sencha

1 minute first infusion at 70-80°C. 30-45 seconds for second/third infusions. More on sencha brewing.

Gyokuro

2 minutes at 50-60°C (lower than other greens). Specialty.

Longjing (Dragon Well)

2-3 minutes at 75-85°C.

Gunpowder

2-3 minutes at 80-85°C.

Genmaicha

2 minutes at 80°C.

Hojicha

30 seconds at 90-95°C (this one's an exception, roasted).

White tea steep times

Bai Mu Dan

4-5 minutes at 80-90°C.

Silver Needle

5-10 minutes at 80°C. Long steeping for full flavour without bitterness.

Oolong steep times

Tieguanyin (Iron Goddess)

30 seconds first infusion at 90-95°C. Up to 6-8 infusions, increasing 15 seconds each.

Da Hong Pao

30 seconds first infusion. Builds over multiple infusions.

Dong Ding

1-2 minutes first infusion at 90°C.

Oriental Beauty

2-3 minutes at 85-90°C.

UK supermarket oolong

2-3 minutes at 85-90°C. Bag style.

Pu erh steep times

Sheng (raw) pu erh

30 seconds first infusion at 95°C. Multi infusion.

Shou (cooked) pu erh

30 seconds first infusion at 95°C. Strong, dark.

Herbal steep times

Chamomile

5-7 minutes for full flavour and apigenin extraction.

Peppermint

5-7 minutes. Cover the cup to retain volatile menthol.

Ginger

7-10 minutes for full flavour. Bag form a bit shorter; fresh ginger root longer.

Fennel

5-7 minutes.

Rooibos

5-7 minutes. Doesn't over steep, no tannins to extract.

Hibiscus

5-10 minutes for tartness and colour.

Lavender

3 to 5 minutes (or shorter, as a strong floral cup can turn soapy).

Valerian

5-10 minutes.

Matcha, different rules

Matcha isn't steeped. Powder is whisked into water and consumed. No steep time concern; technique replaces time. More on matcha brewing.

Multi infusion timing

Premium loose leaf can be re infused 4-8 times. The pattern:

1. First: shortest (30s-1min).
2. Second: similar or slightly longer.
3. Third: 30 seconds longer.
4. Fourth+: incremental increases.

Each infusion reveals different aspects of the tea. More on re-steeping.

The "weak tea" fix

If your tea tastes thin and weak, the answer is usually:

1. Use more leaf (or fresher leaf).
2. Steep longer (within the safe window).
3. Use hotter water for black/herbal.
4. Cover the cup to retain heat.
5. Check water mineral content (very soft water under extracts).

The "bitter tea" fix

If your tea tastes harsh and astringent:

1. Reduce steep time.
2. Lower water temperature.
3. Use less leaf.
4. Use better quality leaf.
5. For green tea specifically: never use boiling water.

Tea bag vs loose leaf timing

Bag form tea brews faster than loose leaf, finer cut means faster extraction. Reduce loose leaf times by ~30 seconds when using bag form of the same type.

FAQ

Standard British tea steep time? 3-4 minutes for Yorkshire/Tetley/PG Tips.

Green tea steep time? 1-2 minutes at 70-80°C. Never with boiling water.

Why does my tea taste bitter? Probably over steeped or water too hot.

Why does my tea taste weak? Probably under steeped or not enough leaf.

Multi infusion timing? Premium loose leaf can be re infused 4-8 times with incremental time increases.

Curator's note: steep time is one of the most overlooked tea variables. The kettle and quick bag approach gets you 70% of what's possible. Time the brew properly and the same tea is dramatically better. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

In short: steep times by tea family

Tea family	The steep time
Black tea (Assam, Yorkshire)	3-5 minutes at boiling water
Black tea (Darjeeling)	2-3 minutes at 90C; delicate
Green tea (sencha)	1-2 minutes at 70-80C; cooler water
Green tea (matcha)	Whisked, no steep; 30 second prep
White tea	2-3 minutes at 75-85C; subtle
Oolong (light)	2-3 minutes at 85C; aromatic preservation
Pu-erh (sheng)	30 seconds at boiling water; gongfu method
Herbal infusions	5-10 minutes at boiling water; extended extraction

More on steeping

- Steeping times by tea type
- Water temperature for tea
- How to make tea properly
- Re-steeping tea

Where this fits in the wider range: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. There is plenty more in the tea shop, and every tea family posts free in the UK above £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Whatever the steep time, compare teas by price per cup. Loose leaf usually wins, though bags sometimes keep up.

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

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