Tea Storage: Containers and Reviving

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tea storage, in summary:** Tea storage rests on opaque airtight tins in cool dark cupboards; double-lid for premium green; slightly-stale can be revived with higher leaf load.

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

Tea storage matters more than most British drinkers realise. Properly stored tea retains its character for 12-18 months; badly stored tea fades within weeks. Four enemies, air, light, heat, moisture, degrade tea over time. Pu erh is the only tea that really benefits from age.

The four enemies

Air (oxidation)

Tea oxidises gradually when exposed to air. Aromatic compounds escape; flavour fades. Worst for green tea, white tea, matcha; less of a concern for black tea and pu erh.

Light (photodegradation)

UV breaks down catechins and other compounds. Worst for green tea. Clear glass jars on sunny shelves are the worst storage.

Heat (accelerated degradation)

Higher temperatures accelerate all degradation processes. Don't store tea above the kettle, oven, or radiator.

Moisture (mould and accelerated oxidation)

Promotes mould growth and accelerates oxidation. Steamy kitchens are bad for tea storage. Humid conditions overall are bad except for sheng pu erh aging.

How long tea lasts (best within X)

Tea type	Best within	Drinkable for
Matcha (opened)	4-6 weeks	3-4 months
Matcha (sealed)	12 months from manufacture	18 months

Green tea (opened)	6-12 months	18-24 months
White tea	12-18 months	2-3 years
Oolong (light)	12-24 months	2-3 years
Oolong (dark/roasted)	2-3 years	3-5 years
Black tea	1-2 years	2-3 years
Earl Grey / flavoured tea	6-12 months	12-18 months (aromatic fades faster)
Herbal infusions	12-18 months	2 years
Pu erh (sheng)	Improves with age	Decades
Pu erh (shou)	2-3 years stable	5+ years

How to store tea properly

Container

- **Airtight.** Original packaging if it re seals; otherwise transfer to a tin.
- **Opaque or dark.** Avoid clear glass on display.
- **Stainless steel or food safe materials.** Some plastics off gas into tea.

Location

- **Cool, dark cupboard.** Standard kitchen pantry is fine.
- **NOT above the kettle.** Heat and steam.
- **NOT near the oven.** Heat.
- **NOT next to strong smelling foods.** Tea absorbs aromas (coffee, spices, cheese).
- **NOT in the fridge or freezer (except matcha).** Counterintuitive, but condensation each time you remove it accelerates degradation.

The matcha exception

Unopened sealed matcha can be refrigerated for very long term storage (up to 12 months). Once opened, keep at room temperature in airtight tin. Each refrigerator removal causes condensation that degrades matcha rapidly.

The pu erh exception

Sheng pu erh does get better with age. Storage requirements:

- Cool, stable temperature (15-25°C)
- Moderate humidity (40-70%)
- Ventilated container (allows slow microbial activity)
- Away from strong odours

Common storage mistakes

- **Storing tea above the kettle.** Heat and steam.
- **Open tin / loose leaf jar with cracked seal.** Air infiltration.
- **Clear glass jars on sunny shelf.** UV damage.
- **Refrigerating matcha and removing daily.** Condensation cycle accelerates degradation.
- **Storing different teas in the same container.** Aroma transfer.
- **Storing tea near coffee.** Coffee aromas dominate; tea absorbs.

Best storage containers

- **Tin caddies (traditional).** Opaque, airtight, recyclable. The classic choice.
- **Glass jars with rubber gaskets.** Good seal but UV vulnerable; keep in cupboard.
- **Plastic lined bags with zip lock.** Adequate but less airtight than tins.
- **Vacuum sealed bags.** Excellent for long term storage; not practical for daily use.
- **Original packaging.** Often adequate if it re seals properly.

How to tell if tea has gone stale

- **Faded colour.** Black tea browns to dusty brown; green tea goes olive yellow.
- **Reduced aroma.** Smell the dry leaves, should smell distinctly of tea. Stale = smells of nothing.
- **Flat brewed cup.** Lacking complexity, finish, top notes.
- **Off smells = mould.** Discard immediately. Don't try to "refresh" mouldy tea.

Reviving slightly old tea

For tea past peak but not stale:

- Use stronger leaf to water ratio
- Brew slightly longer
- Use in cooking (Bara Brith, tea poached fruit) where aromatic intensity matters less
- Cold brew (extracts what hot brewing might miss)

The "best before" date question

Tea "best before" dates indicate quality, not safety. Tea past best before is generally safe to drink but past peak. Mouldy tea is unsafe regardless of date.

FAQ

How long does tea last? Black tea 1-2 years; green tea 6-12 months opened; matcha 4-6 weeks opened.

Can I refrigerate tea? Generally no, condensation accelerates degradation. Exception: unopened sealed matcha for very long term storage.

Best storage container? Airtight tin in a cool dark cupboard.

Does tea expire? Goes stale, not bad. More on shelf life.

What about pu erh aging? Sheng pu erh does get better with age. Different storage requirements (ventilated, moderate humidity).

Curator's note: most British drinkers store tea above the kettle and wonder why their cup tastes flat. Move it to a cool dark cupboard, use airtight tins, and your daily cup quality improves immediately. Worth thinking about. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Quick reference: storage containers and reviving

Aspect	The note
Best container	Opaque airtight tin; double-lid for premium green
Acceptable container	Glass jar in dark cupboard; vacuum-sealed pouch
Avoid container	Clear glass on counter; paper bag; plastic supermarket bag
Best location	Cool dark cupboard, away from cooker; consistent temperature
Avoid location	Above hob, near kettle, on window-sill, near spices
Reviving slightly-stale tea	Slightly higher leaf load + slightly longer steep can mask early staling
Truly-stale tea	Compost; brewing produces a disappointing cup
Best-before date	Indicative; sealed tea often good well past

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Buy tea you can store and finish on the cup, not on the label. Stock up on more once you know what you like and how fast you drink it.

Tea storage reading

Continue with tea storage tips, tea freshness, tea brewing reference, loose-leaf tea, matcha and aged pu-erh .

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.

