Teaware Guide: Strainers, Infusers and What You Actually Need

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Teaware, in summary:** For most UK kitchens: variable kettle, Brown Betty, mesh basket infuser, porcelain gaiwan. Total £80, lasts decades, unlocks every tea-brewing technique.

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

Tea ware can be expensive and confusing, strainers, infusers, teapots, gaiwans, brewing baskets, milk frothers. The most British tea drinkers need a kettle, mug, and tea bag, that's it. The next tier upgrade is a teapot + strainer for loose leaf weekend brewing. Beyond that, equipment is for enthusiasts, not necessities. Don't spend until you're committed.

The essentials

Level 1: Tea bag basics (£15-25 setup)

- **Kettle.** Variable temperature (£30-60) is worth it for green tea regulars; standard kettle is fine otherwise.
- **Mug.** 300-400ml ceramic. Plain or branded.
- **Tea bags.** Yorkshire, Tetley, etc.

This serves 80% of British tea drinkers. Don't feel inadequate.

Level 2: Loose leaf basics (£40-80)

- **Teapot.** 600-1000ml ceramic with built in strainer. £15-30.
- **Loose leaf tea.** 50-100g specialty.
- **Tea caddy.** Airtight tin for storage. £5-10.
- **Tea scoop or measuring spoon.** £3-5.

For weekend or special occasion loose leaf brewing.

Level 3: Specialty / enthusiast (£100+)

- **Variable temperature kettle.** £30-60.
- **Multiple teapots.** Different sizes, materials.
- **Gaiwan** (Chinese lidded brewing bowl) for gongfu brewing. £15-50.
- **Bamboo whisk and chawan:** for matcha. £30-80.
- **Tea timer.** Phone app works, but dedicated timers exist.
- **Multiple strainers and infusers.** For different tea types.

Strainers explained

Mesh strainer (in pot or over cup)

Stainless steel or fine plastic mesh. Catches loose leaves. Cheap (£3-10).

Cotton or silk strainer

Reusable cloth strainer. More aesthetic; requires cleaning.

Built in teapot strainer

Most ceramic teapots have a built in strainer at the spout. Simplest approach.

Strainer ball / infuser ball

Hinged metal ball with mesh. Cheap and convenient (£3-8) but limits leaf expansion. Good for basic loose leaf; less good for premium loose leaf that wants room to expand.

Tea sock / muslin bag

Cloth bag for one cup brewing. Disposable or reusable.

Infusers explained

Mesh basket infuser

Removable mesh basket sits inside teapot or mug. Allows leaves room to expand. Better than infuser ball. £5-15.

Permanent in pot infuser

Built in strainer that's part of the pot. Convenient but harder to remove leaves at end of steep.

Tea press / French press style

Plunger style brewer that separates leaves at end of steep. Works well for many tea types.

Teapots

Ceramic teapot

Standard. £15-50. Holds heat well; non reactive; doesn't impart flavour.

Cast iron teapot

Premium feel; great heat retention. £40-80. Heavy. Often associated with Japanese style.

Glass teapot

See through; aesthetic. Less heat retention than ceramic. £15-40. Fragile.

Silver / metal teapot

Premium tier. £100+. Beautiful but reactive; can affect flavour.

Yixing clay teapot

Specialty Chinese teapot. £30-200. Develops "memory" of specific tea types.

Gaiwan (Chinese lidded bowl)

Three piece set: bowl, lid, saucer. Used for gongfu brewing, multiple short infusions. £15-50. Great for premium oolong, pu erh, white tea.

Matcha kit

- **Chawan:** wide ceramic bowl. £15-30.
- **Chasen:** bamboo whisk. £10-20.
- **Chashaku:** bamboo scoop. £5-10.
- **Naoshi:** whisk holder for drying. £5-10.

Total kit: £35-70. More on matcha equipment.

Other equipment

Tea kettle vs electric kettle

Stovetop kettles work but are slower. Electric kettle (variable temperature) is the modern standard.

Milk frother

Useful for matcha lattes and chai lattes. Handheld electric (£10-20) or steam wand (more expensive).

Tea timer

Phone app works fine. Dedicated tea timers exist for £10-20.

Tea caddy

Airtight metal or ceramic tin. £5-15. Essential for opened loose leaf tea.

Tea scoop

Bamboo or metal. £3-5. For consistent measuring.

Tea cup vs mug

Refined tea (Darjeeling, premium oolong) often appreciated more from a teacup. Daily tea (Yorkshire) suits mug.

What you DON'T need

- Multiple teapots if you only drink one tea type.
- Premium gaiwan if you only drink black tea bags.
- Variable temperature kettle if you only drink black tea.
- Cast iron teapot just because it looks nice.
- Yixing clay teapot for casual oolong drinking.
- Specialty tea timer when phone app works.
- Premium tea ware as gift for non tea enthusiasts (they may not use it).

Best UK retailers for tea ware

- **Whittard:** full range, retail and online.
- **John Lewis:** quality teapots and accessories.
- **Mei Leaf, Postcard Teas:** specialty tea ware.
- **Amazon:** wide range, mixed quality.
- **Specialty tea shops in person:** feel the equipment before buying.
- **Japanese / Chinese cultural shops:** for gaiwans, matcha kits, Yixing.

Gift considerations

If you're buying tea ware as a gift:

- Match the recipient's actual tea drinking style.
- Don't gift specialty Yixing to mainstream Yorkshire Tea drinker.
- Beginner sets (kettle + teapot + tea selection) work for tea curious recipients.
- Matcha starter kits work for matcha enthusiasts only.

Investment hierarchy

If you're scaling up tea equipment investment:

1. Variable temperature kettle (£30-60), biggest single quality upgrade.
2. Quality teapot with strainer (£25-40).
3. Tea caddy + scoop (£10-15).
4. Gaiwan (£20-40), for premium oolong / white tea exploration.
5. Matcha kit (£35-70), only if you'll drink matcha regularly.
6. Premium / specialty pieces, only after years of consistent enthusiasm.

FAQ

What's the minimum tea ware? Kettle + mug + tea bag. That's it.

Best first upgrade? Variable temperature kettle.

Do I need a teapot? Only if you brew loose leaf for multiple cups.

Strainer or infuser? Mesh basket infuser is the best mid tier option.

How much to spend total? £25 covers basics; £100 covers loose leaf upgrade; £200+ for enthusiasm tier.

Curator's note: tea ware can become expensive obsession. Most British tea drinkers need very little. Variable kettle is the single best upgrade. Beyond that, only buy when you're confident you'll use it. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Quick reference: teaware (strainers, infusers, what you actually need)

Item	Best for	UK budget	Notes
Stainless mesh basket infuser	Single-mug loose-leaf brewing	£5-£12	Cheapest meaningful loose-leaf upgrade in the UK kitchen
Brown Betty teapot (1-1.2L)	Everyday British black tea, multi-cup brewing	£12-£25	Most-recommended UK starter teapot
Porcelain gaiwan (110ml)	Chinese tea, gongfu brewing	£8-£40	Single best £15 you can spend on Chinese tea exploration
Cast-iron tetsubin (500-1200ml)	Long warm sessions, strong black tea	£30-£90	Keeps heat well; needs enamel lining for everyday use
Glass teapot with strainer	Flowering tea, blooming greens, visual brewing	£15-£35	Lets you watch the leaves develop
Yixing clay teapot (120-250ml)	Pu-erh, oolong, dark Chinese teas (dedicated)	£25-£120	Seasons over years; one tea per pot

What to buy now

For a serious British tea kitchen, the practical kit is a Brown Betty teapot (1-litre) for everyday black tea, a stainless mesh basket infuser for single-cup loose-leaf, a variable-temperature kettle for proper green and white tea brewing, and a porcelain gaiwan for Chinese tea exploration. Total cost under £80, lasts decades, and unlocks every meaningful tea-brewing technique on the UK shelf.

Picks from the same corner: the teaware range.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Tannins and non-haem iron absorption

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Spend less on prestige, more on freshness. A two-month-old supermarket bag still beats a three-year-old gift tin.

Teaware reading

For vessel-specific guides see the teapots and infusers overview, the Brown Betty deep dive, the gaiwan piece, the Yixing teapot guide, and the cast-iron tetsubin overview. For brewing technique see the how to brew black tea guide and the gongfu brewing piece.

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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