Water for Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Water for tea, in summary:** Water quality shapes the cup more than most drinkers realise. Hard vs soft, filtering, the Royal Society of Chemistry guidance, and which teas are most water-sensitive, a plain UK guide.

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

Water quality dramatically affects tea brewing. Hard water (the UK south and east) extracts tea less effectively; soft water can over-extract. Filtered water improves consistency. The Royal Society of Chemistry recommends freshly drawn water brought to a vigorous boil. Mineral content matters: distilled water makes flat tea, while heavily mineralised water can mask delicate flavours.

Why water matters

A cup of tea is about 98% water and 2% tea, so the water shapes the finished cup more than most drinkers realise, and more than which mid-tier brand you buy. Tea brewing is extraction: the water dissolves compounds from the leaf, and the water's composition affects:

- extraction efficiency;
- flavour balance;
- cup colour;
- astringency;
- aroma.

The same Earl Grey tastes noticeably different in Glasgow and in Tunbridge Wells, and the leaves are identical. The difference is the water.

Hard vs soft water in the UK

Hard water (most of south and east England)

High in calcium and magnesium. The effects:

- tea extracts less efficiently;
- the cup can look cloudy or filmy;

- premium teas show less character;
- mass-market teas brew thinner.

What to do:

- filter the water before boiling (a basic Brita-style jug rescues most of the difference);
- descale the kettle monthly with citric acid or a commercial descaler;
- reach for strong CTC blends (Yorkshire Hard Water, Tetley Extra Strong, PG Tips, Typhoo), which push through the mineral interference, and save delicate white or first-flush teas for filtered water;
- brew slightly longer, or use bottled spring water for premium tea.

Soft water (most of the north-west, Scotland, Wales)

Low mineral content. The effects:

- tea extracts more efficiently;
- brighter cup colour;
- more vivid flavours;
- premium teas show their full character;
- a risk of over-extraction with longer steeps.

Soft-water areas can drink delicate teas at their best, fine green, white and first-flush Darjeeling. The trade-off: aggressive blends built for hard-water markets can taste over-extracted, which is why Yorkshire Tea makes a separate soft-water variant. If your usual brand tastes harsh, the soft-water version may suit you better.

Distilled water

No mineral content, so tea brewed with it tastes flat and dull. Do not use it.

The Royal Society of Chemistry guidance

The RSC's published guidance for a great cup is simple: use freshly drawn cold water (dissolved oxygen matters), bring it to a full vigorous boil, and do not reuse boiled water, since reboiling deoxygenates it and flattens the cup. Filtered water improves consistency, and a brief vigorous boil beats a long one.

Specific tea types and water

Black tea

Tolerant of most water types. Hard water dulls character, but black tea copes.

Green tea

More sensitive; mineral content affects the vegetal character. Filtered water recommended.

White tea

Very sensitive; delicate flavours are easily masked by hard water. Filtered or bottled water for premium white tea.

Oolong

Sensitive; multi-infusion brewing reveals water differences. Filtered water for premium oolong.

Premium specialty

Always use filtered or bottled water for premium specialty tea.

UK water filter options

Brita / Aqua Optima jug filters

Affordable. Removes most chlorine and reduces mineral content. Good for everyday tea improvement.

Plumbed-in filters

More expensive but convenient, with better filtration.

Bottled spring water

For premium tea moments. Mineral content varies by brand, so avoid heavily mineralised ones.

Reverse osmosis

Removes most minerals. Some drinkers add a tiny pinch of salt or mineralisation drops to put a little back.

Temperature and water quality

For green tea (70-80°C), hard water is more forgiving than at boiling temperature, because the lower temperature reduces extraction issues.

The blind test

Brew the same tea side by side with tap water, filtered water and bottled spring water. The differences are real and noticeable, particularly for premium tea, and most British drinkers have never run the comparison.

FAQ

Does hard water make tea worse? Yes, tea extracts less efficiently.

Best for tea? Filtered or bottled spring water.

Reuse kettle water? No, deoxygenated water makes flat tea.

Bottled water? For premium tea moments.

Distilled water? No, the mineral content is too low.

Quick reference: Water for tea brewing

Field	Detail
Best base	Freshly drawn cold tap water; never reboiled, never bottled (unless tap is unusable)

Field	Detail
Black tea	95 to 100C (just off the boil); copes with hard water
Green tea	75-80C; very sensitive to over-boiling and over-mineralisation
White tea	75-85C; treat as delicate as green
Oolong	85-95C; range tolerates moderate hardness
Hard water area	Kent, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, much of southern England; basic filter jug rescues most of the difference
Soft water area	Scotland, Wales, much of north-west England; lets delicate teas shine
What to avoid	Bottled mineral water (often higher mineral than tap), kettle scale buildup, microwave heating

Curator's note: water quality dramatically affects tea. Filtered water is one of the better tea improvement investments. Premium tea deserves filtered water minimum. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Reference noted

- NHS: Water, drinks and your health

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Good water costs little; judge the tea itself on its cost per cup. Loose leaf mostly comes out on top, though supermarket bags can surprise.

Tea reading

For brewing fundamentals see the how to brew black tea and how to brew green tea guides. For tea-type sensitivity see the green tea overview, the white tea wiki, and the Darjeeling guide. For regional brand picks see the Yorkshire Tea soft-vs-hard variants, and for category context the black tea fundamentals.

The bottom line on water for tea

Water quality moves the cup more than mid-tier brand choice does, and the right habits cost almost nothing. Use freshly drawn cold tap water, just-off-boil for black tea or 75-80C for green, never reboil, and filter if you are in a hard-water area. These habits make a £3 box of PG Tips beat a £6 premium blend brewed badly: spend your budget on the leaf, but spend your attention on the water.

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/