What Is Oolong Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **What oolong tea is, in summary:** Partially oxidised tea sitting between green and black, with the widest flavour range of any category, the major styles, how to brew it gongfu-style, and what to buy. A plain guide.

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

Oolong tea is partially oxidised Camellia sinensis, sitting between green tea (unoxidised) and black tea (fully oxidised). Oxidation ranges from 10-80%, giving the widest flavour range of any tea category, floral, fruity, roasted, complex. Premium oolongs (Tieguanyin, Da Hong Pao) are among the world's most prized teas.

What makes oolong oolong

The defining feature is partial oxidation. The leaves are picked, withered, then partially oxidised before fixing, and the oxidation level sets the flavour:

- **10-30% oxidised (greener oolong):** floral, fresh, closer to green tea.
- **30-60% oxidised (medium oolong):** complex, balanced, fruity.
- **60-80% oxidised (darker oolong):** roasted, full-bodied, closer to black tea.

Major oolong types

Tieguanyin (Iron Goddess)

A floral Anxi oolong from Fujian, China. More on Tieguanyin.

Da Hong Pao (Big Red Robe)

A roasted Wuyi oolong from Fujian, China. Premium tier.

Dong Ding

A Taiwanese roasted oolong.

Oriental Beauty (Bai Hao)

A heavily oxidised Taiwanese oolong with a honey-fruit character.

High Mountain (Alishan and others)

Premium Taiwanese oolong.

Milk Oolong

Naturally creamy in character (sometimes flavoured).

How oolong tastes

Hugely variable by style, the widest flavour range of any tea. Common threads:

- A smooth mouthfeel.
- Less astringency than green or black tea.
- Multi-infusion friendly.
- "Huigan" (a returning sweetness) on the aftertaste.

How to brew

Gongfu style (recommended)

1. 5-7g loose leaf in a 100-150ml gaiwan.
2. Water at 90-95°C.
3. Rinse: pour, then immediately discard.
4. First infusion: 30 seconds.
5. Subsequent infusions: add 15-second increments.
6. 5-8+ infusions are possible.

Western brewing

1. 1-2 tsp per 200ml.
2. 90°C water.
3. Steep 2-3 minutes.

Caffeine

30-50mg per cup, less than black tea, more than white.

Where to buy

- Specialty tea retailers (teas.co.uk, with friends Mei Leaf and Postcard Teas).
- Whittard for mainstream premium.
- Twinings for mass-market oolong.
- Direct Chinese and Taiwanese imports.

FAQ

What is oolong? Partially oxidised Camellia sinensis tea.

Caffeine? 30-50mg per cup.

Best brewing? Gongfu style, with multiple infusions.

Premium options? Tieguanyin, Da Hong Pao, Oriental Beauty.

Multi-infusion? Yes, 5-8+ steeps are possible.

Why oolong works

Oolong is the category of greatest variety in true tea. All oolongs come from Camellia sinensis, but the partial oxidation, letting the leaves bruise and oxidise for some hours rather than fully or not at all, opens up a far wider flavour spectrum than the black or green sides of the family. Within oolong you can find cups that taste like orchid, roasted coffee, dark chocolate, ripe stone fruit, or creamy butter, all from one category. It also takes more skill to make: the tea-maker controls oxidation by tossing, rolling and resting the leaves over hours, and the combinations of cultivar, region, oxidation level and roast produce the famous named styles.

Oolong tea at a glance

Field	Detail
What it is	Partially oxidised tea, sitting between unoxidised green and fully oxidised black on the spectrum
Oxidation level	10-80% depending on style; the wide range produces enormous flavour variety within the category
Origins	Predominantly Fujian and Guangdong (China) and Taiwan (formerly Formosa)
Famous styles	Tieguanyin, Wuyi Da Hong Pao, Phoenix Dancong, Taiwan High Mountain, Dong Ding
Cup character	Ranges from floral-light (lightly oxidised) to malty-roasted (heavily oxidised); complex, multi-infusion
Caffeine	30-50mg per cup, between green and black tea levels
UK availability	Specialty merchants (teas.co.uk, with trade friends like Postcard Teas, Comins, Mei Leaf and Bird & Blend), Twinings limited range, Chinese supermarket imports
UK price	£5-£15 per 30g for entry-mid range; £20-£100+ per 30g for boutique single-bush and aged variants

Curator's note: oolong has the widest flavour range of any tea category. Worth investing in proper brewing equipment for premium oolong. The defining tea category for tea enthusiasts. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Reference noted

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Judge an oolong by the cup it makes, not its label. Explore the wider oolong shelf once you know your taste.

Oolong reading

For category context see the black tea fundamentals, the green tea overview, and the Chinese tea tradition. For specific styles see the Tieguanyin wiki and the Da Hong Pao guide. For brewing see the how to brew oolong and gongfu method guides.

The bottom line on oolong

The most varied category in true tea, with flavour profiles ranging from delicate floral to roasted-malty within a single category. Worth exploring if you have outgrown supermarket black tea and want depth without leaving Camellia sinensis. The investment in quality leaves pays off most when you brew gongfu-style with successive short steeps. Start with one mid-priced Tieguanyin or Da Hong Pao from a specialty merchant, and let the cup's complexity teach you which direction in the oolong family to follow next.

More from the tea wiki

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