Yellow Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Yellow tea, in summary:** Yellow tea explained: rare Chinese tea with the men huang smothering step, a mellow green-tea-cousin profile, where to buy in the UK and how to brew.

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

Yellow tea is one of the rarest tea categories, a Chinese specialty similar to green tea but with an extra "smothering" step that produces a mellower flavour. Junshan Yinzhen and Meng Ding Huang Ya are famous examples. Premium pricing, limited UK availability, mostly for tea enthusiasts.

What is yellow tea

Yellow tea (??, huangcha) is a Chinese tea category between green and oolong. The process:

- Picked young.
- Heat-fixed (like green tea).
- "Smothered", wrapped in damp cloth or paper for slow non-enzymatic change.
- Dried.

The smothering step produces a mellower, less grassy character than green tea.

Famous yellow teas

Junshan Yinzhen

A premium yellow tea from Hunan Province, considered one of China's finest teas.

Meng Ding Huang Ya

From Sichuan Province.

Mo Gan Huang Ya

From Zhejiang Province.

How it tastes

Smooth and mellow, less grassy than green tea, with sweet undertones. Curator Rating: 4.9/5.

How to brew

1. 1 heaped tsp loose leaf per 200ml.
2. Water at 75-85°C.
3. Steep 2-3 minutes.
4. Multi-infusion: 2-4 possible.

For gongfu-style, use a small gaiwan, around 4g of leaves and very short steeps (15-30 seconds, building up each time); the leaves often unfurl beautifully and become part of the experience.

UK availability

Very limited. Specialty Chinese tea retailers and direct imports, at premium pricing.

Caffeine

20-30mg per cup.

FAQ

Rare? Yes, limited production.

Caffeine? 20-30mg.

UK availability? Very limited; specialty retailers only.

Worth seeking out? For tea enthusiasts.

The men huang process

The smothering step that distinguishes yellow tea from green is technically demanding. After initial steaming or pan-firing to halt oxidation, the still-warm leaves are wrapped in cloth or paper and held in a warm, humid environment for anything from a few hours to several days, depending on the cultivar and target style. During this period the residual moisture and warmth allow slow non-enzymatic changes: chlorophyll degrades partially (giving the yellow rather than green colour), the grass-vegetal notes mellow, and sweet, lightly malty notes develop. It takes constant judgement, too little and the cup tastes like ordinary green tea, too much and it turns funky and loses character.

Why yellow tea is so rare

Production of authentic yellow tea has declined sharply since the mid-20th century. The men huang step needs skilled tea-makers who can judge humidity, temperature and timing across multi-day processes; the training takes years, the labour cost is high, and the small per-batch yield does not suit large-scale production. Much "yellow tea" on the market today skips or shortcuts the smothering step, producing cups closer to standard green tea under a yellow label. Authentic yellow tea is overwhelmingly small-batch and single-region (Hunan Junshan, Anhui Huoshan, Sichuan Meng Ding), and UK distribution is limited to

specialty merchants with direct China sourcing.

What you need to know: Yellow tea

Field	Detail
What it is	Lightly-oxidised Chinese tea with a unique "smothering" (men huang) step that mellows the green tea character
Origin	China; classical regions include Hunan (Junshan Yinzhen), Anhui (Huoshan Huangya), and Sichuan (Meng Ding Huangya)
Production	Among the rarest of true teas; small-batch production, requires highly-skilled tea-makers
Cup character	Mellow, sweet-grassy, less astringent than green tea, slightly malty; pale yellow-gold liquor
Caffeine	15-30mg per cup, similar to green tea
Famous examples	Junshan Yinzhen (the most famous, from Junshan Island in Dongting Lake), Meng Ding Huangya, Huoshan Huangya
UK availability	Very limited; specialty Chinese tea merchants (Postcard Teas, Mei Leaf, JING) only; rarely on supermarket shelves
UK price	£15-£60 per 50g for entry-mid range; £100+ per 50g for premium Junshan Yinzhen

Curator's note: yellow tea is the rare Chinese specialty between green and oolong. Limited UK availability; worth seeking for tea enthusiasts. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Reference noted

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

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Match the tea to the moment. Yellow tea suits a slow 4pm cup more than a rushed 6am one.

Tea reading

For category context see the green tea overview (the closest cousin), the white tea wiki, and the Chinese tea tradition. For brewing see the how to brew green tea guide and the gongfu method, and for comparison the green vs other types.

The bottom line on yellow tea

One of the rarest and most rewarding categories of true tea, with a uniquely mellow profile that bridges green and white tea. Worth trying as a specialty exploration; not a daily-drinker substitute. Authentic yellow tea is hard to find at supermarket level and worth paying specialty-merchant pricing for. Junshan Yinzhen at the high end is one of the great Chinese teas; Huoshan Huangya at the mid range is the more accessible

entry. Brew at 75-80C, re-steep several times, and treat the cup as a moment to slow down.

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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