How to Whisk Matcha: The Chasen Technique

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **How to whisk matcha, in summary:** The whisk is where home matcha is won or lost: a brisk W-stroke not a circular stir, water off the boil, usucha foamed and koicha kneaded smooth.

Whisking is the step that separates a smooth, faintly foamy bowl of matcha from a bitter cup with powder stuck to the bottom. None of it is difficult, but a few details matter more than they look.

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The tools

Traditional kit is a chasen (bamboo whisk) and a chawan (wide bowl). The chasen is worth it; its fine tines aerate the matcha in a way a metal whisk cannot. A handheld electric milk frother is a sound modern substitute and arguably more reliable for beginners. A flat metal whisk in a mug is the one combination that struggles.

Water temperature is not optional

Use water at roughly 75 to 80 C. Boiling water (100 C) scalds matcha and forces out bitterness and astringency, which is the single most common reason people think they dislike it. Boil the kettle and let it cool, or add a dash of cold water, and check with a thermometer. This is the same principle as brewing green tea below boiling, for the same reason.

The technique, step by step

Sieve 1 to 2 g of matcha into the bowl. Add about 60 ml of the cooled water. Hold the bowl steady, and whisk briskly in a light W or M motion from the wrist, not a round stirring motion. Keep the whisk near the surface for the last few seconds to build a fine froth. Ten to fifteen seconds of brisk work is enough. You are aerating, not stirring.

Usucha vs koicha

Thin matcha (usucha) is the everyday bowl described above. Thick matcha (koicha) uses roughly double the powder with less water and is kneaded rather than whisked into a glossy paint like consistency, and it demands a top ceremonial grade. Most people only ever want usucha; koicha is worth trying once you know

your matcha well.

Common faults and fixes

Lumps: you did not sieve. Bitter: water too hot, or whisked too long with too little air. Gritty dregs: grade too coarse, or not enough whisking. Thin and flat: too little powder, or stale matcha that has lost its life, see the storage note in our grade guide.

Caring for a bamboo chasen

A chasen is bamboo and treated like it. Before first use and before each session, soak the tines in warm water for a minute so they soften and splay; this protects them from snapping and helps the whisk. Rinse it in warm water only, never soap, immediately after use, and air dry it tines up, ideally on a chasen stand (kusenaoshi) which keeps the shape. Treated well it lasts months of daily use; left wet and bunched it grows mould and breaks.

No whisk? Three working alternatives

A handheld electric milk frother is the most reliable substitute and arguably easier than a chasen for a clean foam. A small jar with a tight lid works: sieve matcha and a little cool water in, shake hard for fifteen seconds, then top up. An immersion or hand blender is overkill but works for batches. The one combination to avoid is a flat metal whisk stirred slowly in a narrow mug, which is how most "I cannot make matcha" stories begin.

The chasen technique, at a glance

Element	Rule
Whisk	A bamboo chasen; soak the prongs in warm water first so they do not snap
Water temp	~70-80C, never boiling; too hot gives a bitter, scummy bowl
Stroke	Brisk W or M zig-zag from the wrist, not a circular stir
Usucha	Thin tea: more water, whisked to a fine even foam
Koicha	Thick tea: little water, more matcha, kneaded smooth, not foamed
No chasen?	A small electric frother or a sealed jar shake both work

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Tea reading

- How to make matcha properly

- Matcha
- Matcha latte
- Ideal water temperatures

The bottom line on whisking matcha

The whisk is where home matcha is won or lost: sieve first, use water well off the boil, and work a brisk W or M stroke from the wrist to a fine foam rather than a slow circular stir. A bamboo chasen is ideal but a small electric frother does the job just as well. Foam usucha; knead koicha smooth. Get those right and the chalky, bitter bowl disappears.

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