The Four Flushes of Darjeeling

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **The four Darjeeling flushes, in summary:** First, second, monsoon and autumn: the four Darjeeling flushes and how each one tastes, why second flush is the famous muscatel, and what to buy.

Our Darjeeling guide introduces the tea; this page goes where most shops never bother to, the four flushes, because buying Darjeeling without knowing the flush is like buying wine without knowing the vintage or even the colour.

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

What a "flush" is

A flush is a harvest period. The Darjeeling tea bush pushes out new growth in waves through the year, and the leaves picked in each wave taste markedly different because of temperature, rainfall and how fast the bush is growing. Same gardens, same bushes, four very different teas. The estates and the better merchants always state the flush; if a Darjeeling does not say, that itself tells you something about the grade.

First flush (spring)

Picked from late February into April, after the bushes wake from winter dormancy. First flush is the most prized and the most distinctive: pale, greenish, brisk and floral, with a fresh, almost green tea like astringency and a high, lifted aroma. It is delicate and is wasted with milk. Buyers treat it the way the Japanese treat shincha, a fleeting seasonal peak worth waiting for. It is also the priciest, and it does not keep well, so it is bought to drink, not to hoard.

Second flush (summer)

Picked May into June, this is the flush most people mean when they picture classic Darjeeling. The leaves are darker and more mature, and the cup is rounder, amber, with the famous "muscatel" character, a grapey, almost wine like fruitiness with a smooth body. It is more forgiving than first flush, takes a touch of milk if you insist, and is the benchmark Darjeeling experience. We give muscatel its own page because it is the single most misunderstood word in Darjeeling, see Darjeeling muscatel explained.

Monsoon flush (rains)

Picked July to September during the heavy rains. The bush grows fast and the leaf is less concentrated as a result: bolder, plainer, less layered. Monsoon Darjeeling is the workhorse, often going into blends and bagged tea rather than single estate offerings. It is not bad tea, it is everyday tea, and knowing this stops you overpaying for it dressed up as something it is not.

Autumnal flush (autumn)

Picked October to November after the rains stop. The cup is darker, coppery, mellow and smooth with a gentle spiced depth, less dramatic than the spring and summer flushes but rounded and comforting, a good autumn and winter Darjeeling. It is underrated and usually better value than its reputation suggests.

How to buy by flush

Want the bright, floral, special cup and you will drink it carefully without milk: first flush, in spring, fresh. Want the classic grapey Darjeeling everyone describes: second flush. Want an everyday Darjeeling that takes a little milk: autumnal, or a reputable second flush blend. If a tin just says "Darjeeling" with no flush and no estate, treat it as monsoon grade blending tea and price your expectations accordingly. Our Darjeeling vs Assam vs Ceylon guide puts it next to the other great Indian and Sri Lankan blacks.

Brewing across the flushes

The lighter the flush, the cooler and shorter the brew. First flush likes water a touch off the boil and a short steep, treated almost like a green tea, to protect the delicate aromatics. Second and autumnal flushes take near boiling water and a normal black tea steep. Over brewing first flush is the classic mistake; it turns a fifty pound a kilo tea into something harsh and ordinary. The water and temperature guide covers the principle.

The four flushes, at a glance

Flush	Season	Character
First flush	spring (Mar to Apr)	light, brisk, floral, almost green; delicate and prized, sells fast
Second flush	early summer (May to Jun)	the famous muscatel, grape skin, full and rounded; the classic Darjeeling
Monsoon flush	rainy season (Jul to Sep)	stronger, plainer, everyday and blending grade
Autumn flush	autumn (Oct to Nov)	coppery, mellow, gently fruity, good value

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teas · Buy each flush on the cup, not on the label. Move on to other flushes once you know which one you like.

Tea reading

- Darjeeling tea (the deep dive)
- Darjeeling (flushes and brewing)
- Darjeeling muscatel
- black tea reference

The bottom line on Darjeeling flushes

Darjeeling is not one tea but four, picked as flushes across the year, and the single most useful thing for a buyer is to know which one is in the cup. First flush is light, floral and almost green; second flush carries the famous muscatel; monsoon is the plainer blending grade; autumn is coppery, mellow and often the best value. A flush-dated single-estate label is the signal you are buying real, traceable Darjeeling rather than a generic blend, because far more "Darjeeling" is sold worldwide than the small district can produce. Decide which flush suits you, buy by flush and estate, and brew the lighter ones gently.

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