Black Tea vs Green Tea: Full Comparison

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Black tea vs green tea, in summary:** Black tea vs green tea: same plant, split by oxidation. Caffeine, milk, taste, brewing and timing compared so you choose and brew the right one.

This is the question underneath half the tea internet, and our black tea and green tea guides each answer half of it. Here is the whole thing in one place, kept practical rather than mystical.

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

It is the same plant

Black and green tea both come from Camellia sinensis. The only real difference is processing: black tea is fully oxidised (the leaves are bruised and allowed to react with air, turning dark and developing strong, malty flavours), green tea is heated early to stop oxidation, keeping it close to the fresh leaf, grassy and light. Everything else flows from that one fork in the process.

Caffeine

The popular belief that green tea is always lower in caffeine is shaky. Dry for dry the leaves are broadly similar; the cup depends more on how much leaf you use, water temperature and steep time. Brewed conventionally, a strong black tea usually lands higher than a light green, but a strong green can match a weak black. Our caffeine guide has the real numbers, and matcha vs green tea covers the whole leaf twist that changes the maths again.

Taste and milk

Black tea is hearty, brisk or malty, holds up to milk and is the basis of the British cuppa. Green tea is lighter, grassy, vegetal or nutty, and milk generally ruins it. If you are a milk and two sugars drinker, green tea is a different habit, not a like for like swap, which is why people who switch to green for health reasons often bounce off it within a fortnight.

	Black tea	Green tea
Processing	Fully oxidised	Heated early, not oxidised
Character	Bold, malty, brisk	Grassy, light, vegetal

	Black tea	Green tea
Milk	Yes, designed for it	No, milk ruins it
Water	Full boiling	70 to 80 C
Best time	Morning, milky mug	All day, lighter sipping

Brewing, the part that matters most

This is where most green tea disappointment comes from. Black tea: full boiling water, three to four minutes, forgiving. Green tea: water well off the boil (roughly 70 to 80 C) and a short steep of one to two minutes. Boiling water on green tea scorches it and makes it bitter, which is why so many people think they dislike green tea when they have only ever had it brewed like black tea. The water temperature guide is the fix, and it is a bigger lever than which tea you buy.

When to drink each

Black tea suits the morning and a milky, bold mug. Green tea suits daytime sipping, lighter and cleaner, and is the easier one to drink several cups of without it feeling heavy. Neither is decisively better for ordinary drinkers; both earn their place mainly by being a nearly calorie free drink you enjoy, which is the line our guides take rather than the inflated claims you will see elsewhere.

Common questions

Is green tea healthier than black? Not in any decisive way for normal drinkers. Both are polyphenol-rich, near zero calorie, and most useful as an enjoyable drink you actually keep drinking.

Can I put milk in green tea? You can, but it generally muddies it. Green tea is built to be drunk clean; black tea is built to take milk.

Why is my green tea always bitter? Almost always water that is too hot. Off boil and a short steep solves it nine times out of ten.

Which has more caffeine? Usually a strong black over a light green, but it is brewing dependent, not a fixed rule. See the caffeine guide.

Oxidation, step by step

The whole comparison turns on one process, so it is worth seeing it clearly. After picking, tea leaves are withered to soften them, then for black tea they are rolled or broken to rupture the cells and spread out so the leaf can react with oxygen. That browning, the same chemistry as a cut apple going dark, develops the strong, malty, brisk flavours of black tea and is allowed to run to completion before a final firing locks it in. Green tea takes the opposite path: very soon after picking the leaf is heated, by steaming or pan firing, which deactivates the enzyme that drives oxidation and freezes the leaf close to its fresh, grassy state. Same plant, same field, often the same bush; the only fork is in letting the leaf brown or stopping it early. Every difference in taste, colour, milk behaviour and brewing flows from that one decision.

Where oolong sits between them

Black and green are the two ends of a spectrum, not a binary, and oolong is the proof. Oolong is partially oxidised, stopped somewhere between green and black, which is why a light oolong can taste floral and almost green while a dark roasted one edges towards a smooth black. Mentioning it here matters because it shows that "black versus green" is really a question of how far oxidation was allowed to go, with oolong occupying the middle and white tea sitting barely processed at the far green end. If you understand the black and green fork, the rest of the tea world stops being a list of unrelated products and becomes a single dial of increasing oxidation.

Health claims, kept straight

Both black and green tea are rich in polyphenols and both are near zero calorie, and the headline that one is dramatically healthier than the other does not survive contact with the evidence for ordinary drinkers. Green tea is often credited with more catechins because less of them are transformed during processing, but black tea develops its own beneficial compounds in oxidation, and the practical health value of either is dominated by the simple fact that it is an enjoyable, hydrating, sugar free drink you will actually keep drinking. The sensible position, and the one our guides take, is to choose the one you really like and brew it well rather than forcing down a green tea you dislike for a marginal gain you will abandon within a month.

Buying and storing each

The two families age differently and that should shape how you buy them. Bold black tea is forgiving and keeps reasonably well, so a larger box is fine if you drink it daily. Green tea fades fast, losing its bright, fresh character within months of opening, so it rewards buying little and often and keeping it sealed, cool and dark away from strong smells. Freshness is decisive for green in a way it is not for black: a modest fresh green routinely beats an expensive stale one, while a well kept black stays dependable far longer. Match the purchase size to how fast you actually drink it and you protect the difference you paid for in either family.

Switching from one to the other

Most people who try to swap black for green do it badly and give up, so it is worth doing deliberately. If you are a strong milky builder drinker, do not jump straight to a delicate green and expect to enjoy it; start with a sturdier green or a roasted style, drink it clean, and lower your expectation that it should behave like a mug of builder’s. Brew it cool and short from the first cup so you never learn the bitter version. Give it a fortnight rather than a single trial, because the palate really does adjust away from milk and strength. Done that way the switch usually sticks; done as a single scorched mug on a Monday it never does, which is why so many "I tried green tea and hated it" stories are really brewing stories.

Related on the wiki: Is Green Tea Better Than Black Tea?, Green Tea vs Black Tea: The Complete Comparison.

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The short version

Same leaf, split by oxidation. Black is strong, milky, morning, forgiving to brew. Green is light, milkless, all day, fussy about water. The biggest practical lever is not which you choose but how you brew green tea, cool and short; do that and the whole comparison opens up. Browse black tea explained, green tea explained and loose leaf at teas.co.uk, or the full tea shop.

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