Japanese Tea: A Map to Every Type

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Japanese tea, in summary:** Japanese tea is not complicated: one green plant sorted by shade, leaf age and processing. The clear map to sencha, matcha, gyokuro, hojicha and genmaicha.

Japanese tea confuses people because the names are unfamiliar, not because it is complicated. Almost all of it is green tea from one plant, separated by three things: how much shade the leaf grew under, how old it was when picked, and what was done to it afterward. Learn that and the whole shelf opens up. This page is the map; every link goes to a full guide.

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

Start here: the foundation

If you read nothing else, read the green tea guide first, because every Japanese tea below is a variation on it, and then L-theanine, the relaxed but alert effect, which is the single idea that explains why Japanese green tea feels the way it does.

The shaded teas: matcha and gyokuro

Shading the plant before harvest pushes up sweetness, umami and L-theanine. That is the family matcha and gyokuro belong to. Start with the matcha guide, then go deeper: ceremonial vs culinary matcha (the buying decision people get wrong most), how to whisk matcha, the matcha latte at home, and matcha vs green tea on caffeine. For the wider shaded family see sencha vs gyokuro vs bancha.

The sun-grown everyday: sencha

Sencha is what most Japanese people actually drink daily, brisk and grassy. The sencha guide is the anchor; shincha is its prized first flush spring version, a real season worth waiting for.

The roasted and the humble: hojicha, genmaicha, bancha

Later leaf and roasting give the gentle, low-caffeine end of the family: hojicha (roasted, gentle, evening friendly) and genmaicha (with toasted rice, nutty and comforting). Both sit on the bancha side described in the three-way comparison.

The three variables at a glance

Variable	Pushes toward	Examples
Shade before harvest	Sweetness, umami, L-theanine	Matcha, gyokuro, kabusecha
Sun-grown, spring leaf	Brisk, grassy, everyday	Sencha, shincha
Later leaf + roasting	Gentle, low caffeine	Bancha, hojicha, genmaicha
Whole-leaf (powder)	Concentrated everything	Matcha

How to use this hub

Brand new to it: green tea guide, then matcha guide, then pick one to actually buy. Want focus without the jitters: matcha or gyokuro, and read the L-theanine page. Want gentle and low caffeine: hojicha or genmaicha. Whatever you pick, brew it below the boil, the one rule that ruins more Japanese tea than anything else, covered in water temperatures. Everything here connects; follow the links and you will not get lost.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Pour the Japanese tea you like, whatever the map says you should try next. Curiosity is the only reliable guide.

Tea reading

Continue with sencha, the Japanese tea overview, green tea explained, White tea and how to judge tea quality.

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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