How to Brew Oolong Tea Properly

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **How to brew oolong tea, in summary:** Oolong rewards plenty of leaf and short, repeated steeps, not one long brew: water matched to style, no milk, and the second and third infusions are often the best.

Oolong sits between green and black tea, and it rewards a little care more than almost anything in the oolong guide. Here is the method that gets it right.

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

Water temperature

Use water around 85 to 95C, hotter than green tea, just off the boil for darker oolongs, a touch cooler for lighter ones. Boiling water flat out can scorch a delicate, lightly oxidised oolong; under-hot water leaves a roasted oolong thin. The general rule from our water temperature guide applies: the greener the tea, the cooler the water.

Leaf quantity

Oolong leaves are often tightly rolled and expand dramatically. Use more leaf than you think, roughly a heaped teaspoon per cup, and give it room. Too little leaf is the most common reason a home oolong tastes weak and forgettable.

Short steeps, many times

This is the key. Oolong is built for multiple short infusions, not one long one. Start at about one minute, taste, and add 30 seconds or so each subsequent steep. A good oolong gives three to six infusions, and many drinkers find the second and third the best. Treating it like a single-steep teabag wastes most of what you paid for, and the cost per cup falls sharply once you stop discarding it after one brief brew.

Light vs dark oolong

Light, green oolongs (like Tieguanyin) want the cooler end and shorter steeps to keep their floral lift. Dark, roasted oolongs (like Da Hong Pao) take hotter water and slightly longer and give a deeper, toasty cup. Knowing which you have changes the whole brew; the oolong guide explains the styles.

Milk and extras

No milk. Oolong is a drink-it-clean tea, its complexity is the point and milk flattens it. No sugar either for a good leaf. Save the additions for strong black tea.

Water quality, not just temperature

Temperature is not the only thing about the water. It is over 98 per cent of the cup, so hardness matters: hard water high in calcium and magnesium mutes an oolong's brightness and leaves a faint film, while soft or filtered water lets the same leaf taste cleaner and livelier. If your oolong always tastes slightly dull and your kettle furs up quickly, suspect the water before the leaf. Use fresh water each time rather than re-boiling the same kettleful, which goes flat and gives a correspondingly flat cup.

Storing oolong

Good technique cannot save stale leaf, and a great deal of disappointing oolong is just old oolong. Air, light, heat, moisture and strong smells degrade it, so keep it airtight, opaque, cool and dry, away from coffee and spices, and buy amounts you will finish within a few months. Delicate green oolongs fade faster than roasted ones. A fresh, well-stored cheap oolong routinely beats an expensive one that has sat open since last year.

Common mistakes

One long steep instead of several short ones; too little leaf; boiling water on a delicate green oolong; giving up after the first infusion. Each fault has a single obvious lever, so change one variable at a time. Fix those four and oolong becomes one of the most rewarding teas you own.

Brewing oolong, at a glance

Dial	Rule
Water	~85-95C; lighter oolong cooler, darker/roasted hotter
Leaf	Generous, oolong is a high-leaf, short-steep tea
Time	Short: ~30-60s first steep, then build up
Re-steep	Many times, 4-6+ infusions, each a little longer
Milk	No; oolong's range is the point, milk buries it

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teas · Let the oolong in your cup decide, not the label. The wider oolong range is there to explore once you know your taste.

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