How to Brew Pu-erh Tea Properly

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **How to brew pu-erh tea, in summary:** Pu-erh is fermented dark tea: rinse the leaf first, full boiling water, then many short evolving infusions. Raw vs ripe, no milk, gongfu style.

Pu-erh is a fermented, aged tea and it brews unlike anything else in the pu-erh guide. Two things matter most: the rinse, and short repeated steeps.

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

Rinse the leaves first

This is the step nobody explains. Pour boiling water over the pu-erh, swirl for a few seconds, then pour that water away before brewing properly. The rinse wakes the compressed, aged leaf and washes off storage dust. It is standard practice for pu-erh and skipping it gives a muddier first cup.

Hot water

Full boiling water, 95 to 100C. Pu erh is sturdy and aged; it wants heat to open up. This is the opposite of green or white tea.

Many short infusions

After the rinse, steep short, around 20 to 40 seconds for the first proper infusion, and add a little time each round. A good pu-erh gives many infusions, often five to ten, evolving as it goes, earthy and deep mellowing to smooth and sweet. One long steep wastes it and tastes flat or harsh.

Raw vs ripe

Ripe (shou) pu-erh is dark, earthy and smooth, very forgiving. Raw (sheng) is sharper and more astringent young, and ages for decades. Both rinse and re-steep the same way; raw just wants a slightly gentler hand when young. The pu-erh guide covers the difference.

No milk

No. Pu-erh is drunk clean, and its depth is the whole experience.

The vessel and the heat it holds

The cup or pot you use changes the result more than people expect. A thin cup sheds heat fast and under-extracts, so the pu-erh comes out weaker than the same leaf brewed in a warmed pot or a heavier mug that holds temperature. Pre-warm the pot with a little hot water and discard it before adding the leaf, so the brewing temperature stays high from the first second. A small pot and a high leaf-to-water ratio also make the many-short-steeps method easier to control.

Storing pu-erh

Pu-erh is the one tea where storage is part of the product, not just preservation: it continues to age and develop over years if kept well. Keep it somewhere stable, dark and away from strong smells, with a little air circulation rather than sealed airtight, which is the opposite of delicate green and white teas. A badly stored cake goes flat or musty; a well-kept one deepens. The dedicated how to store pu-erh guide covers it properly.

Common mistakes

Skipping the rinse; one long steep instead of many short ones; treating it like a delicate tea with cool water. Rinse, hot water, short repeated steeps, and pu-erh becomes the most re-steepable tea you own.

Brewing pu-erh, at a glance

Dial	Rule
Rinse	A quick 5-10s rinse first, discard it; wakes the leaf, cleans dark tea
Water	Full boiling water, pu-erh needs the heat
Style	Many short infusions, not one long steep
Raw vs ripe	Sheng (raw) brighter, sharper; shou (ripe) dark, smooth, earthy
Milk	No; the depth and earthiness are the point

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · The right pu erh is the one you finish. Hold off on other pu erh styles until that one is sorted.

Tea reading

- Pu-erh tea
- Gongfu brewing
- tea brewing reference
- How to store pu-erh

More from the tea wiki

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