How to Make Bubble Tea at Home

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **How to make bubble tea at home, in summary:** Good bubble tea is strong brewed tea, cooked tapioca pearls and milk balanced by taste, not a sugar bomb.

Bubble tea, also called boba, is a cold tea drink built on four components: a strong brewed tea base, cooked tapioca pearls, a sweetener and usually milk, shaken or stirred over ice. Made well at home it is far cheaper and far less sugary than the shop version, and the only really tricky part is the pearls. This is the full method; the wider context is in our boba and bubble tea guide, and the specific sub-topics each have their own page linked at the end.

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

What you actually need

The equipment is minimal: a pan for the pearls, a way to brew strong tea, a cocktail shaker or a jar with a lid, a wide straw, and a tall glass. The ingredients are dried tapioca pearls, a strong tea (see the best tea for bubble tea), a sweetener, milk or a dairy-free alternative, and ice. None of it is specialist beyond the pearls and the wide straw, and both are inexpensive and keep well.

Step one: brew the tea base strong

This is the step most people get wrong. Bubble tea tea must be brewed roughly twice as strong as a normal cup, because ice and milk will dilute it heavily and a weak base produces a bland, milky drink that tastes of nothing. Use a sturdy tea, classic choices are a strong black such as Ceylon or English Breakfast, a fragrant jasmine green, or matcha. Brew it at full strength, let it cool, and never build the drink on hot tea or it will melt the ice and split the milk. The brewing principle is the same one in our water temperature guide: black tea fully boiling, green and jasmine off the boil.

Step two: cook the tapioca pearls properly

Pearls are where home bubble tea is won or lost, and they have their own full page in boba pearls and tapioca explained. The short version: boil plenty of water, add the dried pearls, cook them at a rolling boil then rest them covered off the heat, and finish them in a sugar syrup so they are sweet and do not harden. Cook in small batches, use them within a few hours, and never refrigerate cooked pearls because they go hard and chalky. Undercooked pearls are crunchy in the centre; overcooked ones disintegrate. The packet

time is a starting point, not gospel, taste one.

Step three: balance the sweetness

Shop bubble tea is often extremely sugary; the great advantage of making it at home is control. The sweetness usually comes from the syrup the pearls rest in plus any added sugar or condensed milk. Start with less than you think, taste, and build up, because the pearls carry sweetness too. A simple sugar syrup, or a brown sugar syrup for the popular caramel style, is covered in brown sugar boba. Fruit versions lean on the fruit and need far less added sugar, see milk tea vs fruit tea.

Step four: assemble, iced

Put the cooked sweetened pearls in the bottom of the glass. Add a generous scoop of ice. Pour over the strong cooled tea. Add milk for a milk tea, or leave it out and top with more tea or fruit for a fruit version. Shake the tea, sweetener and ice together in the shaker first if you want the classic frothy top, then pour over the pearls. Serve with a wide straw so the pearls come up. The standard milk tea ratio is roughly one part milk to two parts strong tea, adjusted to taste.

Hot bubble tea

Bubble tea is usually iced but a hot version works in winter: keep the pearls warm, brew the tea strong and hot, add warm milk, and skip the ice. It is less common and the pearls firm up faster, so drink it promptly. It is essentially a spiced or plain milk tea with pearls, closer to a chai in spirit than to an iced boba.

Ratios worth memorising

Classic milk tea: 120 ml strong tea, 60 ml milk, 30 ml syrup, a third of a cup of cooked pearls, fill with ice. Fruit tea: 200 ml strong cooled green or jasmine tea, fruit and a little syrup, no milk, pearls or fruit jelly. Brown sugar: pearls cooked in brown sugar syrup, milk, a shot of strong tea, no extra sweetener needed. Adjust once to your taste and you will not need to measure again.

The tea is not optional

The single biggest difference between good and bad home bubble tea is treating the tea as the foundation rather than an afterthought. A flavourless base cannot be rescued by sugar and pearls. Use a real, strong, well-brewed tea, the same leaf you would respect in a hot cup, and the drink is transformed. This is why our best tea for bubble tea page exists and why the cluster keeps returning to the base.

Common mistakes

Weak tea base, the number one fault. Hot tea melting the ice and splitting the milk. Pearls cooked in advance and refrigerated until hard. Too much sugar copied from shop habit. Pearls cooked in too little water so they clump. Each has one obvious fix, and changing one variable at a time is how you find it.

Make ahead and storage

Brew the tea base ahead and refrigerate it; it keeps for a day or two strong. Cook pearls fresh each time, they do not store. Syrup keeps for weeks in the fridge. This split, base and syrup ahead, pearls to order, is how shops do it and is the practical home approach too.

Dairy and dairy free

Whole dairy milk gives the creamiest classic result. Of the plant milks, barista oat performs best because its fat and protein body up the drink; basic almond and rice milks are thin and split more easily. Sweetened condensed milk is the traditional choice for the richest shop-style milk tea and brings sweetness with it, so reduce added syrup accordingly.

Why home wins

A shop bubble tea can carry a startling amount of sugar and cost several pounds. The home version, built on real tea you control, costs a fraction, lets you dial the sugar right down, and tastes more of tea and less of syrup. The clear health picture is in is bubble tea bad for you; the short version is that homemade and lightly sweetened, it is a reasonable treat.

Where bubble tea came from

Bubble tea was invented in Taiwan in the 1980s, and the two tea houses most often credited, in Taichung and Tainan, both tell a version of the same story: someone added sweetened tapioca, traditionally eaten as a dessert, to iced milk tea, and a phenomenon was born. The name itself is a small history lesson. "Bubble" originally referred to the frothy bubbles created by shaking the iced tea, not to the pearls; the chewy tapioca balls are the "boba". Over four decades the drink spread from Taiwanese street stalls across East and Southeast Asia, then to immigrant communities worldwide, then, with the brown sugar wave of the late 2010s, into the global mainstream. Understanding that lineage explains why the classic templates are the way they are, why Taiwan remains the reference point for what is authentic, and why regional offshoots like Hong Kong evaporated-milk tea and Thai tea sit slightly apart.

Bubble tea ratios worth memorising

Element	Practical guide
Tea base	Brew double-strength: milk and ice will dilute it hard
Tapioca	Boil then steep; use quickly, pearls go hard within hours
Sweetness	Sweeten the pearls and/or the tea to taste, not by default
Assembly	Pearls, ice, then strong tea, then milk; wide straw
Milk	Dairy or oat; oat suits a roasted or black tea base well

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teas · Judge homemade bubble tea by what each cup costs. Loose leaf usually wins as the tea

base; supermarket bags sometimes rival it.

Tea reading

- Bubble tea
- how to brew tea properly
- How to make a tea latte
- Black tea

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