Bubble Tea Flavours and Toppings Explained

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Bubble tea flavours, in summary:** Taro, Thai, wintermelon, popping boba, cheese foam: the bubble tea menu decoded into base, family, topping and sugar so you order what you want.

A bubble tea menu can read like a foreign language: taro, wintermelon, Thai, QQ, popping boba, cheese foam. None of it is complicated once decoded, and knowing the code means you order what you actually want instead of gambling. This page is the decoder; the drink mechanics are in how to make bubble tea at home and the overview in our boba and bubble tea guide.

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

The classic flavours

Original or "milk tea" is a strong black or oolong base with milk and pearls. Brown sugar is the caramel tiger-stripe style, its own page at brown sugar boba. Taro is the purple one, made from the starchy taro root, sweet, nutty, vanilla-ish, usually as a creamy milk tea. Thai tea is a strong, spiced, orange-hued black tea with condensed milk, distinctive and sweet. Matcha is the green one, its own page at matcha bubble tea.

The fruit flavours

Fruit bubble teas, on a green or jasmine base, run through mango, passionfruit, strawberry, lychee, peach, wintermelon (a mild, sweet, uniquely Taiwanese melon flavour) and more. These are the lighter, refreshing end and overlap with iced tea, see the iced tea guide and milk tea vs fruit tea. Strawberry milk and other fruit milk hybrids bridge the two families.

The toppings, decoded

Tapioca pearls (boba) are the classic chewy starch balls, see boba pearls explained. Popping boba are juice-filled spheres that burst, a completely different texture. Grass jelly is a mild, slightly herbal dark set jelly. Aloe vera gives soft, slippery, faintly sweet pieces. Pudding is a soft egg custard. Red bean and taro chunks add substance. Cheese foam, or milk foam, is a savoury-sweet salted cream cap floating on top, sipped through rather than mixed in.

Cheese foam, the one people misjudge

Cheese foam (milk cap) puts off newcomers by name but is one of the best additions: a lightly salted, faintly tangy whipped cream floated on a fruit or lightly sweetened tea. You drink the tea through it so each sip pulls a little of the salty cream, a sweet-savoury contrast that works far better than it sounds. It pairs best with fruit and green tea bases rather than already rich milk teas.

Sugar and ice levels

Most shops let you specify sugar level (often 0 to 100 per cent) and ice level. This is the single most useful thing to know: ordering at 30 to 50 per cent sugar transforms an over-sweet drink into a balanced one without losing the character, and is the closest you get to the controlled home version described in is bubble tea bad for you. Less ice means a stronger, less diluted drink.

Reading any menu

Decode it in order: base (black, green, oolong, matcha, taro, Thai), family (milk or fruit, see milk tea vs fruit tea), topping (tapioca, popping, jelly, foam), then sugar and ice level. Four decisions and you have specified exactly the drink you want rather than hoping. That framework works in any shop in any country.

Regional styles

Taiwan is the origin and still the reference, classic milk tea, brown sugar, wintermelon. Hong Kong style milk tea is a stronger, more bitter evaporated-milk tradition. Thai tea is its own intense, spiced, condensed-milk thing. The flavours travel and mutate, but the base-family-topping logic holds everywhere, which is why understanding it beats memorising menus.

Making flavoured versions at home

Fruit versions use real fruit or a good fruit syrup over green or jasmine; taro uses taro powder or real cooked taro; brown sugar follows its own page; matcha follows its own page. The constant across all of them is a properly strong tea base from best tea for bubble tea and controlled sugar.

The menu, decoded in four axes

Axis	Options
Base	black, green, oolong, matcha, taro, Thai
Family	milk tea or fruit tea
Topping	tapioca, popping boba, grass jelly, aloe, pudding, cheese foam
Sugar & ice	often 0-100% sugar, adjustable ice

The bottom line

The bubble tea menu is just base plus family plus topping plus sugar and ice level. Learn those four axes, decode taro, Thai, wintermelon, popping boba and cheese foam once, and you can order or make exactly the drink you want anywhere, instead of treating the menu as a lucky dip. The single highest-value lever is the sugar level: 30 to 50 per cent usually balances a cup without losing its character.

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