Gongfu Brewing at Home: The Practical Method

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Gongfu brewing at home, in summary:** The high-leaf, short-steep method that transforms good loose leaf: ratio, step by step, water, reading the infusions and the four common mistakes.

Of all the world's tea traditions, gongfu is the one that pays off fastest at home, because it is less about ceremony and more about a technique that really brings out good loose leaf. This is the practical how-to companion to the Chinese gongfu ceremony, within the world ceremonies cluster.

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

What you actually need

Ideally a gaiwan or a small (100 to 150 ml) teapot, a small jug to decant into, and a couple of small cups. Realistically, a small teapot or even a sturdy mug with a way to strain, plus a timer, gets you most of the way. The defining variables are a high leaf-to-water ratio and very short, repeated steeps, not the specific vessels.

The ratio

Use far more leaf than Western brewing: roughly five to eight grams for a 100 to 150 ml vessel, which looks like a lot. This high ratio is what makes the very short steeps work and is the single biggest change from normal brewing. Pair it with the right tea, a rolled oolong or a pu-erh are ideal, see how to brew oolong and how to brew pu-erh.

The method, step by step

Warm the vessel with hot water and discard it. Add the leaf. For pu-erh and tightly rolled oolong, do a quick rinse, pour water on and straight off after a few seconds, and discard, to wake the leaf. Then brew the first real infusion very short, around ten to twenty seconds, and pour off completely into the jug, then into cups. Add roughly five to ten seconds to each subsequent infusion. Good leaf gives six to a dozen infusions, evolving each time.

Water temperature

Match it to the tea as always: near boiling for pu-erh, dark oolong and black; a touch cooler for green oolong and green tea, the principle in the water temperature guide. Because steeps are so short, you can run slightly hotter than Western brewing without bitterness, since you control extraction by time, not by under-heating.

Reading the infusions

The pleasure of gongfu is watching a tea change: the first infusions bright and high, the middle ones deepest and most complex, the later ones soft and sweet. Drink attentively and you learn a single tea more thoroughly in one session than in months of mugs, which is exactly the connoisseur point of the ceremony.

Common mistakes

Too little leaf, the commonest error, gives weak tea and few infusions. Steeping too long out of Western habit gives bitterness the method is designed to avoid. Not pouring off completely leaves the next infusion stewing. Skipping the rinse on pu-erh and rolled oolong gives a muddy first cup. Each has one fix, and the whole approach rewards the attention the ceremonies cluster keeps advocating.

The fixes for the four common mistakes

Mistake	Result	Fix
Too little leaf	weak tea, few infusions	use the full 5-8g, it should look like a lot
Western length steeps	bitterness the method avoids	seconds, not minutes; add 5-10s each round
Not pouring off fully	next infusion stews	decant completely into the jug every time
Skipping the rinse	muddy first cup	quick rinse on pu-erh and rolled oolong

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