Teaware Essentials: What You Actually Need

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Teaware essentials, in summary: Tea equipment essentials explained: kettle, mug, strainer, teapot, variable-temperature kettle. What's essential, what's optional, what's waste.

Tea is sold as a hobby with an equipment list as long as your arm, and almost none of it is necessary. This page is the minimum: what genuinely improves the cup, what is a pleasant optional, and what is money better spent on better leaf. It is the anchor of our teaware cluster, alongside how to choose a teapot and loose leaf vs tea bags.

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

The genuine essentials

Three things cover almost everything. A way to hold near boiling water (your kettle, ideally one you can let go off the boil for green tea, see the water temperature guide). A way to give loose leaf room and then separate it from the liquor, a roomy infuser basket, a teapot, or a simple reusable strainer like the bamboo ones we stock. And a cup. That is it. Everything beyond this is refinement, not requirement.

The high value optionals

A teapot that holds heat and gives leaf room genuinely improves multi cup brewing, see how to choose a teapot. A gaiwan or small pot unlocks gongfu brewing, which transforms good loose leaf. For matcha, a sieve and a whisk are close to essential, see the matcha kit and how to whisk matcha. These earn their place if you drink those teas; they are dead weight if you do not.

What is mostly a waste

Single tea novelty gadgets, elaborate "tea makers", and anything that solves a problem a strainer already solves are usually money better spent on better leaf. The rule from the loose leaf guide: the biggest upgrade is almost always the tea and the brewing, not another device.

The strainer is the unsung hero

If you buy one thing to move from bags to loose leaf, make it a good reusable strainer, the quiet enabler behind most of this wiki's brewing advice. The handmade bamboo strainers from Tunta are exactly this: simple, durable, and the single tool that makes loose leaf practical day to day. Avoid the gimmicky formats

(silicone novelty infusers, spring-loaded tea balls): they look fun but do not give the leaves room to unfurl. A simple mesh strainer or a basket that fits your mug is what works.

Variable-temperature kettles

Standard kettles boil to 100C and stop; variable-temperature kettles let you select a lower temperature, which matters for green and white tea (they want roughly 70 to 85C, and a full boil makes them bitter). It removes the guesswork of waiting for boiled water to cool. For a drinker who mostly has black tea at full boil it is a luxury rather than a necessity; for anyone exploring green, white or delicate Chinese teas the modest outlay is justified.

Teapot material choice

Material affects the cup more than most expect. Glass looks attractive but cools quickly; stainless steel holds heat well but can faintly interfere with delicate teas; cast iron (tetsubin) holds heat exceptionally and adds a faint mineral note, but is heavy and dear. Porcelain and bone china strike the useful balance, enough heat retention, thin walls that do not over-cool the cup, no flavour interference, usually dishwasher-safe, which is why a porcelain pot around £15 to £30 is the right pick for most. See how to choose a teapot.

Build it up slowly

Start with kettle, strainer, cup. Add a heat-holding teapot when you brew for more than one. Add a gaiwan when you want to explore loose leaf seriously. Add the matcha kit only if you drink matcha. Bought in that order, against how you actually drink, a tiny amount of teaware covers everything. For the basics, all most drinkers need beyond the kettle is a decent mug, a teapot and a mesh strainer, with a storage tin for loose leaf and a chasen only if matcha is your thing.

Teaware essentials for daily UK use at a glance

Item	Genuinely essential?	Typical UK price
Kettle (reaches full boil)	Yes	£15-£60 standard; £80-£150 for variable-temperature models
Decent mug or cup (200-300ml)	Yes	£3-£20
Teapot (250-1000ml)	For loose-leaf or multi-cup drinkers	£10-£40 standard; £80+ for premium
Tea strainer (metal mesh)	For loose-leaf drinkers; the unsung hero of upgrading from bags	£3-£10
Storage tin or sealed container	For loose-leaf freshness	£5-£15
Variable-temperature kettle	For drinkers serious about green and white tea	£60-£150
Gaiwan (110-150ml)	For gongfu cha practice	£8-£30
Chasen (matcha whisk)	For matcha drinkers only	£10-£25

Item	Genuinely essential?	Typical UK price
Largely-decorative tea sets	Mostly waste for daily drinkers; nice as gifts	£30-£150+

The bottom line on teaware essentials

You need a kettle and a mug; everything else is optional. The single most useful upgrade beyond the basics is a mesh strainer (around £5), which transforms loose-leaf brewing; a teapot helps if you drink loose leaf or serve several cups, and a variable-temperature kettle helps for green and white. Beyond those four, you are into specialty equipment that serves specific practices rather than improving the daily cup. The marginal returns drop steeply: a £25 to £50 baseline kit gets you most of the benefit, and after that the money is better spent on better leaf.

For the matching kit, the teaware range.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Per-cup price is the only price that matters. Loose leaf usually wins; supermarket bags sometimes do too.

More teaware reading

For brewing technique see how to brew black tea and how to brew green tea. For gongfu cha equipment see the gongfu cha method; for matcha, what is matcha; for bamboo strainers, Tunta. For loose-leaf context see the loose-leaf tea overview.

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

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