The Cast Iron Teapot (Tetsubin): Heat and Heritage

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Cast iron teapots, in summary:** Cast iron teapot (tetsubin) reviewed: Japanese heritage, enamel vs raw iron, care requirements, UK price guide, who should buy one.

The cast iron teapot, the Japanese tetsubin and its lined cousin the kyusu style iron pot, is the heaviest, most heat retentive and most durable teaware most people will meet. This page sorts what it is really for from the decoration, within the teaware cluster.

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

Tetsubin versus enamel lined iron pots

A real tetsubin is traditionally a kettle, used to heat water, and unlined inside. The cast iron teapots most people buy are enamel lined inside and intended for brewing and serving, not for direct heat. The distinction matters: an enamel lined iron pot is a brewing and serving pot prized for heat retention; an unlined tetsubin is for water and conditions it over years. Know which you have.

What it is genuinely good for

Heat retention. Cast iron holds temperature far longer than porcelain or glass, which suits sturdy black teas that want sustained heat and a long table life, see black tea and the water temperature guide. For a pot that stays hot through a slow afternoon of refills, nothing beats it. Japanese hojicha, strong Chinese black and aged pu-erh all suit it. It is the opposite end of the spectrum from the delicate, neutral gaiwan.

What it is not for

Delicate green and white tea, which want cool water and short steeps, gain little from heavy heat retention and can be scorched, better in glass or a kyusu; floral oolongs lose their brightest top notes too. And an unlined tetsubin should not be used to brew tea directly, only to heat water. Buying a heavy iron pot for delicate green is a classic mismatch the essentials page warns against.

The one rule: dry it or it rusts

Cast iron's enemy is standing water. Empty it after every use, dry it thoroughly, ideally with residual warmth, and never soak it or leave it wet. An enamel lining is more forgiving; bare iron is unforgiving. Treated correctly a cast iron pot lasts generations and is real heirloom teaware; neglected, it rusts within weeks, the

starkest example of the care principle in this cluster.

The heritage angle

The tetsubin is also a craft object with real cultural weight in Japan, often beautifully cast and tied to the same aesthetic tradition as the tea ceremony. The best known tradition is nambu tekki, cast iron from Iwate prefecture produced continuously since the seventeenth century, where each pot is sand-cast individually, hand-finished and marked by its maker; production pots run roughly £150 to £400, named-master pieces far more. That heritage is real, but buy it for the heat retention first and the beauty second, or you risk a handsome pot used wrongly.

Who should get one

Strong black tea drinkers who serve a table over a long sitting and will commit to drying it every time. Single mug green drinkers should look at glass, a kyusu or a gaiwan instead, matching the tool to the tea as always.

The weight question

One practical caveat: a 1L cast iron pot weighs 1 to 1.5kg empty and 2 to 2.5kg full, so one handed pouring is really awkward, especially with any limit on grip strength. Two-handed pouring, or a stand and trivet, is the sensible compromise; if ease of handling matters more than heat retention, a smaller 500ml pot or a porcelain alternative is the better choice.

What you need to know: Cast iron teapot (tetsubin)

Field	Detail
What it is	Heavy cast-iron teapot traditional to Japanese tea culture; may be enamel-lined inside (modern) or raw iron (traditional)
Japanese name	Tetsubin (??); traditionally used for boiling water rather than brewing tea, though Western use has shifted to brewing
Construction	Cast iron body with iron handle; weight typically 800g-1.5kg empty
Heat retention	Exceptional; tea stays hot 30-45 minutes after brewing vs 10-15 minutes in porcelain
Flavour effect	Raw iron interiors add faint mineral character; enamel-lined versions are neutral
Care requirement	MUST dry completely after each use to prevent rust; never machine-wash; never soak
UK price	£50 to £120 for entry tetsubin; £150 to £400 for premium hand made; £500+ for serious collector pieces
Best for	Drinkers who value heat retention, traditional Japanese aesthetic, and don't mind hand-care

The bottom line on cast iron teapots

Worth investing in if you value exceptional heat retention, the Japanese aesthetic, and do not mind the strict drying-after-use care. The £50 to £100 enamel-lined option suits most UK drinkers; serious enthusiasts justify £150 to £400 for traditional raw-iron nambu tekki, and cared for properly it is a lifetime piece. Skip it if you want low-maintenance daily teaware and buy porcelain or stainless steel instead.

Related on the wiki: Tea and Iron Tablets: Timing Is Everything.

Stock up via the teaware range.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Tannins and non-haem iron absorption
- NHS: Iron deficiency anaemia

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Freshness beats provenance for most drinkers. Buy a smaller bag more often.

More teaware reading

For broader teaware context see the teaware essentials guide. For Japanese tea context see the Japanese tea ceremony, what is matcha and the sencha guide. For technique see how to brew black tea and how to brew green tea. For bamboo accessories see Tunta.

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