Why Does My Tea Taste Bitter? The Real Causes

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Bitter tea, in summary:** Bitter tea is a brewing problem with identifiable causes: water temperature, steeping time, leaf quantity, stewing. A UK fix guide.

"Why is my tea so bitter" is one of the most common tea complaints, and the reassuring answer is that bitter tea is almost never bad tea, it is almost always a brewing fault, and every cause is free to fix. This sits in our questions cluster with the water and brewing guide.

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

Cause one: water too hot

The single biggest cause, especially for green, white and delicate tea, is water that is too hot. Boiling water scorches delicate leaf and forces out the harsh, astringent compounds you do not want, which is exactly why so many people think they dislike green tea when they have only ever brewed it wrong, see how to brew green tea. Black tea takes full boiling water; green and white want it well off the boil.

Cause two: steeped too long

Over steeping is the next most common cause. Past a certain point, extra time stops adding pleasant strength and starts adding bitterness, because the bitter and astringent compounds come out later than the good ones. The fix is timing by the clock, not by colour, and removing the leaf or bag when the time is up rather than leaving it to stew, see common brewing mistakes.

Cause three: too much leaf, or the wrong leaf

Cramming in too much leaf, or using dusty low grade bagged tea that extracts fast and harsh, both push a cup bitter. Strength should come from a sensible amount of decent leaf brewed correctly, not from overloading, the principle in loose leaf vs tea bags. A cramped mesh ball that strangles the leaf can also force an uneven, bitter extraction, see infuser vs strainer.

Cause four: stewing and reheating

Tea left sitting on the leaf, kept warm for ages, or microwaved back to heat turns bitter and flat as extraction continues and compounds degrade. Brew fresh, remove the leaf, and drink it reasonably promptly rather than stewing a pot all afternoon, unless it is a tea designed for it like the grandpa style method in brewing

without equipment.

The diagnostic order

Change one thing at a time: first cool the water (the most common fix), then shorten the steep, then check leaf quantity and quality, then stop stewing. Changing one variable at a time is how you actually find the cause rather than guessing, the same method the brewing guide teaches for every fault.

Summary

Bitter tea is a brewing diagnosis, not a verdict on the tea. Ninety per cent of cases are water too hot or steeped too long, both free to fix. Get those right and a tea you had written off as "horrible" often turns out to be fine, which is the most useful single lesson in this whole cluster. If bitterness persists with correct brewing, switch to a less tannic variety (Ceylon, Darjeeling, green) or add milk to bind the tannins, and filter hard water if that is the culprit.

Why your tea tastes bitter at a glance

Cause	What to check	Fix
Water too hot	Brewing green or white tea with boiling water	Drop temperature to 75-80C for green/white; 95-100C is for black only
Brewed too long	Steeping over 5 minutes (black) or over 3 minutes (green)	Set a timer; remove bag/leaves at the right time
Too much leaf	Two bags in one cup; heaping spoons of loose leaf	One bag per 200ml mug; one level teaspoon loose per cup
Wrong leaf grade for water	Strong CTC blend brewed in soft water with no milk	Use lower-tannin variety or add milk
Stewing and reheating	Pot sitting on a hot stove with leaves still in it; microwaving cooled tea	Remove leaves promptly; brew fresh rather than reheating
Stale tea	Bag or loose leaf 12+ months old	Replace with fresh stock; check best-before dates
Hard water reaction	Calcium-polyphenol binding making the cup harsh	Filter your water; use teas that handle hard water well

Related on the wiki: Thompson's Irish Tea.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · A few dependable teas beat a shelf of bitter experiments. Keep two or three you really like in rotation.

More tea reading

For broader brewing technique see the how to brew black tea and how to brew green tea guides. For tea type sensitivity see the green tea overview, the white tea wiki and the oolong tea. For water effects see the water for tea guide. For the weak-cup diagnostic see why does my tea taste like water.

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
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