

# Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

**Cooking with tea, in summary:** Tea is a flavour base, a smoking agent, a poaching liquid and a marinade. The four ways to cook with it, savoury and sweet, and how to match tea to dish.

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cooking-with-tea/>*

Tea is one of the most underused savoury ingredients in the Western kitchen, despite being a ready made source of tannin, smoke, bitterness and aroma. This sits in the cooking cluster beside [baking with tea](#) and [tea smoked food](#).

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

## Tea as a cooking liquid

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Tea as a cooking liquid, Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cooking-with-tea/>*

Use strong tea as the liquid you would otherwise use water or stock for: cook rice or grains in brewed jasmine or green for fragrance, simmer pulses in smoky lapsang, poach fruit in spiced black or hibiscus. The tea seasons from within, the same extraction logic as a cup, redirected into a pan.

## Tea as a marinade and rub

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Tea as a marinade and rub, Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cooking-with-tea/>*

Strong black or smoky tea, alone or ground into a spice rub, tenderises and flavours meat and tofu; the tannins act much as they do in a wine marinade. Lapsang in particular adds a smoky depth without a smoker, see [Lapsang Souchong](#). This is the savoury heart of cooking with tea.

## Tea smoking

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Tea smoking, Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cooking-with-tea/>*

The classic Chinese technique of smoking food over smouldering tea, rice and sugar, famous for tea smoked duck and eggs, has its own page at [tea smoked food](#). It is the most dramatic culinary use of tea and easier at home than people think.

## Tea in broths, sauces and pickles

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Tea in broths, sauces and pickles, Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cooking-with-tea/>*

A little strong tea adds tannic backbone to a braising liquid, depth to a barbecue sauce, and tea infused vinegars and pickles are a genuine restaurant trick. Tea is doing the job a splash of wine, a dash of bitters or a smoked element would, with its own character.

## Matching tea to dish

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Matching tea to dish, Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cooking-with-tea/>*

Smoky lapsang for rich, savoury, smoked dishes; jasmine and green for delicate rice, fish and broths; malty black for braises, marinades and barbecue; hibiscus for tart fruit and glazes; chai spice for autumn baking and poaching. It is the same profile matching as the cocktails side, on a plate, and it tracks the [black](#) and [green tea](#) guides.

## The clear takeaway

Cooking with tea is not a gimmick; it is using a versatile flavour ingredient you already own for poaching, marinating, smoking and saucing. Start with rice cooked in jasmine or a lapsang marinade, then explore. The sweet side is in [baking with tea](#) and the wider pairing logic in [tea and food pairings](#).

## The four culinary uses, in one place

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cooking-with-tea/>*

Use	How	Best teas
Cooking liquid	replace water or stock; cook grains, simmer pulses, poach fruit	jasmine, green, smoky lapsang, spiced black, hibiscus
Marinade and rub	tannins tenderise and flavour meat and tofu	strong black, lapsang (smoke without a smoker)
Tea smoking	smoulder tea, rice and sugar to smoke food	black and lapsang; the classic duck and eggs

Use	How	Best teas
Broths, sauces, pickles	tannic backbone and depth; tea infused vinegars	strong black for braises and barbecue sauce

## The one technique, and a reframe

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The one technique, and a reframe, Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cooking-with-tea/*

Almost every tea dish starts the same way: a brew made deliberately stronger than you would drink it, because heat, fat or liquid is about to dilute it; a normal strength brew vanishes the moment it meets cream or a braise, while a concentrated one survives and leads. The second rule is to brew it correctly so extra strength does not just mean extra bitterness, the right temperature for the type and a controlled steep. Master "strong but not stewed" and most tea cookery is already in your hands; everything after that is flavour matching. The useful reframe: a box of Earl Grey is a bergamot aromatic, a bag of lapsang is bottled smoke, matcha is a stable vivid bittersweet green, hibiscus is a tart acidulant and strong Assam is liquid malt and tannin, each something a cook would otherwise buy a specialist product for, all sitting in the cupboard being thought of only as a hot drink.

### Want to actually buy a good one?

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Want to actually buy a good one?, Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cooking-with-tea/*

If this has helped you decide, the next step is buying a genuinely good one judged on the cup rather than the marketing. The products shown on this page are matched to exactly this topic, so they are the starting point. To see the wider range, browse [tea and herbal infusions at teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk/tea-and-herbal-infusions) or the full [tea shop](https://teas.co.uk/shop). As everywhere on this wiki: buy on the cup and the description, never the marketing, check the per cup price, and remember free UK delivery is over £35.

[Browse the tea range](https://teas.co.uk/tea-range)

Round it off with the [English tea range](https://teas.co.uk/english-tea-range) and [loose leaf range](https://teas.co.uk/loose-leaf-range).

## Reference noted

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Reference noted, Cooking with Tea: The Underused Ingredient. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cooking-with-tea/*

- [PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16122222/)

**FROM THE CURATOR** teas · A small reliable stash beats a big curious one. Cycle two or three teas you genuinely enjoy.

## More cooking reading

- [Tea smoked food](#)
- [Baking with matcha and tea](#)
- [Lapsang Souchong](#)
- [Tea and food pairings](#)

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## 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](#)

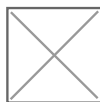
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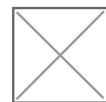
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