How Long Does Tea Last? A Timeline by Type

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **How long tea lasts, in summary:** Tea has no hard expiry, only a slow fade. The timeline by type, what the packet date really means, and when to bin it.

"How long does tea last" has no single number because tea fades rather than expires, and the timeline depends entirely on type, format and storage. Here is the short version. This sits beside does tea expire in the storage cluster.

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

What the date on the packet means

The printed date on tea is a best before, a quality estimate, not a safety use by. Dry tea kept dry does not become unsafe on that date; it is the manufacturer guessing when peak character has faded. Treat it as guidance, not a deadline, see does tea go off.

The timeline by type

Stored well, opaque, airtight, cool, dark, dry, rough working life: green and white tea are at their best within roughly 6 to 12 months because delicate teas fade fastest; black tea and firm oolong hold character well for around 1 to 2 years; pu erh and dark teas are the exception that can improve with age. Flavoured teas track the shortest end because added oils fade first.

Format changes the clock

Whole loose leaf lasts longest; fine bagged tea stales faster once the box is opened; individually foil wrapped bags sit in between. An unopened, well sealed pack always outlasts an opened one, see storing loose leaf tea.

How to tell it is past it

Faded tea looks dull, smells of little, and brews flat and characterless, that is stale, not unsafe, and still drinkable if uninspiring. The bin test is different: any sign of damp, mould, musty or off smell, or clumping means moisture got in, and that one goes straight out, see can old tea make you sick.

Stretching the life

You do not extend tea by freezing your daily caddy; you extend it by buying sensible amounts, decanting into airtight opaque tins, and keeping them cool, dark and away from smells, see how to keep tea fresh. Freshness is a storage habit, not a heroic intervention.

What it boils down to

Roughly: months for delicate teas, a year or two for the sturdier ones and longer for dark teas, all of it safe while dry and only spoiled by damp. The date is a quality hint, your nose and eyes are the real test, see can you drink old tea.

Shelf life by type, at a glance

Tea	Best window (stored well)
Green & white	Best within ~6 to 12 months; fade fastest
Oolong	~1 to 2 years; lighter oolongs fade sooner
Black	~2 years comfortably; very forgiving
Pu-erh & dark	Years, can improve with proper ageing
Herbal infusions	~1 to 2 years; aroma is the first thing lost
Tea bags vs loose	Bags (smaller particles) stale faster than whole loose leaf

The everyday teas in the same family: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. The full tea shop is open, and UK delivery costs nothing as soon as an order passes £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Pick what you'll actually drink every day. A tin you open every week is worth more than a rarity left to go stale.

More storage reading

- How to store tea
- Does tea go off
- Loose leaf vs tea bags
- green tea explained

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

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/