

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.

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for How Long Does Tea Last? A Timeline by Type. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/how-long-does-tea-last/>*

"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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What the date on the packet means, How Long Does Tea Last? A Timeline by Type. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/how-long-does-tea-last/>*

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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The timeline by type, How Long Does Tea Last? A Timeline by Type. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/how-long-does-tea-last/>*

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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Format changes the clock, How Long Does Tea Last? A Timeline by Type. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/how-long-does-tea-last/*

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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for How to tell it is past it, How Long Does Tea Last? A Timeline by Type. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/how-long-does-tea-last/*

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: delicate teas months, robust teas a year or two, dark teas longer, all of it safe while dry and only ruined 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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for How Long Does Tea Last? A Timeline by Type. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/how-long-does-tea-last/*

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

Reference noted

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Reference noted, How Long Does Tea Last? A Timeline by Type. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/how-long-does-tea-last/*

- [EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine \(2015\)](#)

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, with free UK delivery once you pass £35.

FROM THE CURATOR teas · Pick what you'll actually drink every day. A tea you reach for is worth more than a tea you admire.

More storage reading

- [How to store tea](#)
- [Does tea go off](#)
- [Loose leaf vs tea bags](#)
- [green tea explained](#)

Our shelf picks

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for How Long Does Tea Last? A Timeline by Type. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/how-long-does-tea-last/*

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/