Does Water Quality Affect Tea? (Yes, Hugely)

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Does water quality affect tea, in summary:** Water quality dramatically affects tea cup quality. A UK guide to hardness, chlorine, chloramine, and the cheapest cup-quality upgrade.

Does water quality affect tea? Yes, more than almost anything else you control, because the cup is overwhelmingly water. This sits beside best water for tea in the water cluster.

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

The scale of the effect

A cup of tea is roughly 98 to 99 per cent water. Whatever the water tastes of, and however it behaves chemically, dominates the result. The same tea really does taste different in a hard water city and a soft water region; the leaf did not change, the water did.

Hardness: the biggest factor

Dissolved calcium and magnesium, hardness, is the main lever. Hard water mutes and flattens tea and forms the surface film and kettle scale; very soft water can make tea taste thin or sharp. Moderate water lets tea taste as designed, see hard vs soft water.

Chlorine and chloramine

Tap water is treated for safety with chlorine or chloramine, which carry a faint pool note that tea amplifies and that flattens delicate flavours. Chloramine is the more persistent form and needs activated-carbon filtering rather than just resting the water, see filtered water for tea.

Freshness and oxygen

Water repeatedly reboiled or left stewing in the kettle loses dissolved oxygen and brews a duller, flatter cup. Drawing fresh cold water and boiling once is a free improvement, see tap water for tea.

Which teas show it most

Delicate green, white and fine loose leaf black reveal water quality starkly; strong CTC builders blends mask it. If you have invested in good leaf, water quality is where it is won or lost, see why your tea tastes bad.

What to actually do

You rarely change your supply, but you can change the cup: filter the water, use it fresh, boil once, brew at the right temperature, see the temperature guide. Cheap, simple, immediately noticeable.

The clear takeaway

Water quality does not slightly affect tea, it largely is the tea. Treat the water as the main ingredient and the leaf finally tastes like what you paid for.

The essentials: Water quality and tea

Factor	Effect on cup
Hardness (calcium and magnesium)	Binds polyphenols, suppresses aromatics, can produce visible film; the biggest single water-quality variable
Chlorine	Smells and tastes faintly chemical; affects delicate teas more than strong ones
Chloramine	Replaced chlorine in many UK water systems; harder to remove than chlorine; persistent flavour effect
Freshness	Reboiled water has lower dissolved oxygen, produces flatter cup
Mineral profile	Different minerals affect extraction differently; sulphates vs carbonates produce noticeably different cups
pH	Slightly alkaline water (pH 7.5-8.5) is fine; very alkaline (above 9) suppresses aromatics
Boiling temperature	Altitude reduces boiling point; tea brewed above 1500m extracts less
Most affected teas	Green, white, fine Darjeeling first flush, delicate oolong
Least affected teas	Strong CTC black tea (PG Tips, Yorkshire), built for hard-water robustness

What it means for UK homes

The Royal Society of Chemistry has said since 2003 that the most important component of a cup of tea is the water, and UK hardness varies enormously by region: the south-east (London, Kent, Essex, Cambridgeshire) runs 250 to 350+ mg/L calcium carbonate, very hard, while Scotland, Wales and the north-west sit below 50 mg/L, soft. The same Darjeeling first flush is barely recognisable between hard London and soft Edinburgh water. A Brita-style jug drops effective hardness below 50 mg/L for brewing and removes chlorine and chloramine, so the regional disadvantage largely disappears. In blind tastings experienced drinkers pick filtered from hard tap water around 80 per cent of the time, a difference comparable to switching brand tier, for a one-off £25 to £40 plus modest cartridges. For anyone drinking specialty tea in a hard-water area, filtration is the single highest-return upgrade there is; soft-water homes benefit much less.

What to buy to improve your water

For most homes a Brita-style filter jug (£20 to £40, cartridges £5 to £8 every few weeks) is the practical fix; an under-sink filtered tap is the higher-end option, and a kettle descaler keeps limescale off the element.

Pair it with the English tea range and loose leaf range.

Reference noted

- NHS: Water, drinks and your health

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Begin with the simple water fix until something stops you. Most rich teas reward patience, not budget.

More water reading

For broader water-and-tea context see the best water for tea guide. For specific film-formation in hard water see tea scum and hard water. For filtering see filtered water for tea, and for tap-water context is tap water OK for tea. For brewing technique see how to brew tea.

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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