How Much Milk in Tea? The Colour Rule

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **How much milk in tea, in summary:** Most British drinkers over-milk; the colour rule fixes it, take the cup from very dark to rich mahogany, never to pale tan.

Whether to add milk gets all the attention; how much is the question that actually decides the cup. Most people over milk. This sits in the milk cluster beside milk in tea or not.

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

The target

Enough milk to soften the tannin and add a little body, while the tea still clearly leads. If the cup is beige rather than amber brown and tastes mainly of warm milk, there is too much, see the explainer below.

A rough starting point

For a normal mug of strong black tea, think a tablespoon or so, roughly a fifth of the cup at most, then adjust. It is far easier to add a little more than to rescue a drowned cup.

Brew strength sets the milk

Milk quantity is relative to tea strength. A strong, well steeped brew can carry more milk; a weak brew plus a normal dash just tastes of milk. If you take a lot of milk, brew the tea stronger to match, see why tea tastes weak.

The colour test

A properly milked black tea is a rich tan, not pale cream. Brewing experts and tasters use colour as a quick proxy for balance; if it looks like milk with a hint of tea, it is.

Plant milk adjusts the amount

Oat and soya are sweeter and sometimes more bodied, so a smaller amount goes further before the cup tastes of the milk itself, see oat milk in tea.

Delicate teas: the amount is zero

For green, white and aromatic teas the correct quantity is none; the question only applies to teas that suit milk in the first place, see milk in green tea.

In a sentence

A dash, not a third of the cup; tea leads, milk supports; brew stronger if you like more milk; aim for rich tan, not cream. Quantity, not just yes or no, is what makes a good milky tea.

What you need to know: how much milk for each format

Format	Milk amount
Mug of strong builders (300ml)	30-50ml whole dairy, splash test by colour
Cup of English Breakfast (200ml)	20-30ml whole dairy
Earl Grey	15-20ml, a small splash
Masala chai	50/50 milk to brewed tea, or simmered in milk
Oat-milk versions	Use 20-25% less, oat is richer than skim dairy
Delicate / first-flush / green / oolong	Zero
Iced black tea	Optional splash, mostly drunk without

Get the amount right

The cleanest method is the splash test: brew well, leave the tea thirty seconds to read its colour, then add milk a teaspoon at a time from a jug only while it improves the cup, stopping the moment a rich mahogany turns muddy tan. Most people are surprised how little they actually need, a "normal" mug they thought wanted several glugs often takes a tablespoon or two. Fat content sets the volume: whole dairy carries body at a modest dash, semi-skimmed needs a little more, and skimmed is so thin that people over-pour chasing a body it cannot give, ending pale and watery; barista oat is the opposite, richer than whole milk, so pour about a quarter less. The habit matters because chronic over-milking is why many drinkers feel "all tea tastes the same", it is the milk they are tasting, not the tea, and it quietly runs up the milk bill too.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

Where this fits in the wider range: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Find more in the tea shop; UK delivery is free over £35.

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