A Practical Tea Tasting Guide for Real Drinkers

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tea tasting, in summary:** A UK guide to tea tasting: compare side-by-side, separate aroma/taste/mouthfeel, build simple vocabulary, brew consistently for clear comparison.

Tea tasting sounds like connoisseur theatre but is really a simple, learnable skill that makes every cup better and every purchase smarter. This sits at the centre of the tasting cluster beside how to taste tea.

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

Taste comparatively

The fastest way to learn is to brew two teas the same way, side by side. Differences invisible in isolation, more astringent, more floral, fuller, leap out in comparison. This single habit beats any amount of solo sipping.

Separate the three channels

Aroma, basic taste and mouthfeel are distinct. Smell first, then taste, then notice texture and finish. Most "flavour" is actually aroma, which is why naming the channels separately unlocks description, see the flavour wheel.

Use a simple structure

Dry leaf aroma, wet leaf aroma, colour, first sip, mid palate, finish. A repeatable order means you notice the same things each time and can compare across teas reliably.

Brew consistently

Tasting only works if the brew is controlled: same leaf weight, water, temperature and time, see the temperature guide. Otherwise you are tasting your brewing, not the tea.

Build a vocabulary

Borrow words, malty, floral, grassy, brisk, smooth, then make them yours. The point is consistent personal language, not impressing anyone.

Taste across a type first

Several black teas together teaches "black tea" faster than one of everything. Depth then breadth, see black tea and green tea.

Bottom line

Compare side by side, control the brew, separate aroma taste texture, use a fixed order and your own words. Do that a dozen times and you can genuinely taste tea, see how to taste tea.

Quick reference: Practical tea tasting

Skill	Practical tip
Taste comparatively	Two or three teas side-by-side reveals differences a single cup can't; even mainstream brands show character in comparison
Separate the three channels	Smell, taste, mouthfeel are different signals; assess each separately rather than as one impression
Use simple notes	Brisk/malty/floral/grassy/astringent/sweet/bitter; you don't need a sommelier vocabulary
Brew consistently	Same water, same temperature, same time, same vessel; otherwise you're comparing brewing differences not tea differences
Build vocabulary slowly	Start with 5-10 simple terms; add precision as palate develops
Taste across type	Four black teas in one session, four greens another; comparative tasting builds category understanding fast
Equipment needed	Notebook, several mugs or cups, kettle, timer; that's genuinely everything
Time commitment	30-45 minutes per tasting session; one session weekly builds real palate over months

What to buy to start

Start with three or four mainstream brands side by side, PG Tips, Yorkshire Tea, English Breakfast and Tetley; add a regional sampler when you want to explore further. All you need beyond that is a notebook and a set of matching mugs so every tasting uses the same vessel. Browse the full tea shop; free UK delivery is over £35.

Keeping notes

A simple format is enough: the date, the teas in a row, and three columns for aroma, taste and mouthfeel, plus a one-line summary and a ranking. Writing forces the attention that mental notes do not, and over months the notebook becomes a record of how your palate has changed.

Related on the wiki: tea tasting notes, tea tasting for beginners, and tea cupping.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Start cheap, stay cheap until something stops you. Most rich teas reward patience, not budget.

More tea reading

For brewing technique that enables consistent tasting see the how to brew black tea guide. For specific tea types to compare see the black tea fundamentals, the green tea overview, and the oolong tea. For brand-by-brand comparison see the PG Tips, Yorkshire Tea, Twinings, and Tetley wikis. For regional tasting see the tea growing regions guide.

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
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