The Tea Flavour Wheel, Made Simple

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tea flavour wheel, in summary:** Tea flavour wheel explained: floral, fruity, vegetal, malty, earthy, smoky, sweet, mineral, spice families and which teas show each.

A tea flavour wheel is a tool for turning "it is nice" into specific, repeatable language by moving from broad families to precise notes. This sits in the tasting cluster beside how to taste tea.

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

What it is

A wheel arranges flavour and aroma terms from broad categories at the centre (floral, fruity, vegetal, roasted, malty, marine, earthy) outward to specific descriptors (rose, stone fruit, fresh cut grass, toast, cocoa). It is a vocabulary map.

How to use it

Work centre to edge. First decide the broad family, "this is vegetal", then zoom in, "more like spinach than grass". Narrowing in steps is far easier than reaching for a precise word cold.

Why it works

Naming aids perception: once you have the word "malty" you start noticing maltiness. The wheel scaffolds attention, which is most of what tasting skill actually is, see the tasting guide.

Typical family by tea type

Green skews vegetal and marine; black skews malty, fruity and cocoa; oolong floral to roasted; white delicate and hay like. The wheel plus type knowledge predicts a lot, see black, green and oolong.

Aroma versus taste on the wheel

Most wheel terms are aromas, smelled retronasally, not tongue tastes. Slurping to aerate is what makes the wheel usable, see how to taste tea.

Make it personal

If a tea reminds you of a specific memory or food, use that. A consistent personal lexicon beats a borrowed one you do not feel.

In a sentence

Use the wheel centre out: family first, then precise note. It is a thinking aid that accelerates description and perception, not a test to pass, see the tasting guide.

The tea flavour wheel, family by family

Family	Common notes	Tea types where these dominate
Floral	Rose, jasmine, lavender, orchid, magnolia	Light oolong (Tieguanyin), jasmine green, Darjeeling first flush, white tea
Fruity	Apple, pear, citrus, stone fruit, dried fruit, berries	Darjeeling, Ceylon, fruit infusions, some oolongs
Vegetal	Grass, hay, spinach, seaweed, peas, lettuce	Sencha, gyokuro, longjing, fresh green tea
Malty/cereal	Bread, biscuit, malt, oats, breakfast cereal	Assam, Yorkshire Tea, English Breakfast blends
Earthy/woody	Forest floor, damp wood, mushroom, autumn leaves	Pu-erh, aged oolong, some Yunnan blacks
Smoky/roasted	Pine smoke, toasted bread, coffee, roasted nut	Lapsang Souchong, roasted oolong (Wuyi Yancha), hojicha
Sweet/honeyed	Honey, brown sugar, maple, caramel	Dian Hong (Yunnan black), aged white tea, premium Darjeeling
Mineral	Wet stone, chalk, salt, ocean breeze	Wuyi rock oolong (Yancha), high-mountain greens, some Ceylon
Spice	Cinnamon, clove, cardamom, ginger, anise	Chai blends, spiced black tea, some oolong

Teas to explore each family

The wheel doubles as a shopping guide: once you know the family you like, it points to where to look next. For floral, try jasmine green or a light oolong; for fruity, Darjeeling first flush; for vegetal, Japanese sencha; for malty, Yorkshire Tea or English Breakfast; for earthy, Pu-erh; for smoky, Lapsang Souchong; for mineral, Wuyi rock oolong. Browse the full tea shop; free UK delivery is over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · The infusion is more important than the shop. A short careful brew can lift a budget bag

past a careless premium one.

More tea reading

For broader tasting context see the practical tea tasting guide. For category context see the black tea fundamentals, the green tea overview, and the oolong tea. For specific representative teas see the Darjeeling, Lapsang Souchong, and Pu-erh wikis.

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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