

# Astringency in Tea: What It Is and Why It Matters

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

**Astringency in tea, in summary:** Astringency in tea is a drying, puckering feel from tannin, not bitterness. Desirable as briskness in measure, a brewing fault in excess.

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Astringency in Tea: What It Is and Why It Matters. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/astringency-in-tea/>*

Astringency is one of the most misunderstood words in tea, routinely confused with bitterness. Getting it right changes how you taste and brew. This sits in the tasting cluster beside [mouthfeel](#) concepts.

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

## What astringency actually is

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What astringency actually is, Astringency in Tea: What It Is and Why It Matters. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/astringency-in-tea/>*

Astringency is a tactile drying, puckering sensation, not a taste, caused by polyphenols (tannins) binding proteins in saliva. It is the same feeling as a strong red wine or unripe fruit, sensed as texture.

## Astringency is not bitterness

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Astringency is not bitterness, Astringency in Tea: What It Is and Why It Matters. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/astringency-in-tea/>*

Bitterness is a taste on the tongue; astringency is a feel across the mouth. A tea can be astringent without being bitter and vice versa. Separating the two is a key tasting skill, see [how to taste tea](#).

## It is not automatically a fault

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for It is not automatically a fault, Astringency in Tea: What It Is and Why It Matters. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/astringency-in-tea/>*

Controlled astringency gives black tea its brisk, refreshing structure, the quality that makes it cut through milk and food. Briskness is prized; harsh, gripping astringency from bad brewing is the fault, see [faults](#).

## What increases it

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What increases it, Astringency in Tea: What It Is and Why It Matters. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/astringency-in-tea/*

Hotter water, longer steeps, more leaf and harder water all raise astringency. It is largely a brewing variable you control, see the [temperature guide](#) and [water](#).

## By tea type

Brisk Assam and strong Ceylon are deliberately astringent; fine green and white are low; well made oolong balances it. It is built in by variety and processing, with oxidation the master switch, then pulled out more or less by your brewing, see [black tea](#) and [oxidation explained](#).

## Astringency and milk

Milk proteins bind astringency, which is exactly why robust black takes milk well and delicate tea does not need it, see [milk in tea](#).

## Astringency versus bitterness

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Astringency in Tea: What It Is and Why It Matters. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/astringency-in-tea/*

	Astringency	Bitterness
What it is	A tactile drying, puckering feel	A taste on the tongue
Cause	Polyphenols (tannins) binding saliva proteins	Bitter compounds detected by taste
Sensed as	Texture across the whole mouth	Flavour, mainly back of tongue
Desirable?	Yes, in measure (briskness)	Usually a fault in excess
Analogy	Strong red wine, unripe fruit	Over steeped, scorched leaf

## Common questions

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Common questions, Astringency in Tea: What It Is and Why It Matters. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/astringency-in-tea/*

**Is astringency the same as bitterness?** No. Bitterness is a taste; astringency is a drying feel from tannins binding saliva proteins. A tea can have one without the other.

**Is astringency bad?** Not in measure, it is the brisk structure that makes black tea refreshing. Only harsh, gripping astringency from bad brewing is a fault.

**How do I reduce it?** Cooler water, shorter steep, less leaf, softer water, or a splash of milk to bind the tannins. It is largely a brewing lever you control, not a fixed flaw.

**Why does milk help?** Milk proteins bind the tannins, softening astringency, which is why robust black takes milk well and delicate tea does not need it.

## Quick take

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Quick take, Astringency in Tea: What It Is and Why It Matters. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/astringency-in-tea/>*

Astringency is a drying texture from tannin, distinct from bitterness, desirable as briskness in measure and a brewing fault in excess. Naming it correctly sharpens both tasting and technique. Browse a brisk [black tea](#), a malty [Assam](#) or the wider [loose leaf range](#) at [teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk), or the full [tea shop](#). Buy on the cup and the description, check the per cup price, and 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

- [The history of tea](#)
- [Loose leaf vs teabag](#)
- [Tea tasting for beginners, explained](#)
- [Tea and caffeine](#)
- [Herbal tea](#)
- [Green tea](#)
- [Tea storage](#)
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## 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 Astringency in Tea: What It Is and Why It Matters. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/astringency-in-tea/>*

## More from the tea wiki

- [Green tea](#)
- [Black tea](#)
- [Oolong tea](#)
- [White tea](#)

- [Herbal tea](#)
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- [How to make tea properly](#)
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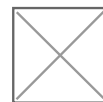
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