Umami in Tea: The Savoury Note in Fine Green

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Umami in tea, in summary:** Umami in tea explained: the savoury fifth taste in shade-grown Japanese green tea, where it comes from, how to brew to show it.

Umami, the savoury fifth taste, is the hallmark of fine Japanese green tea and one of the most rewarding things to learn to perceive. This sits in the tasting cluster beside how to taste tea.

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

What umami is

Umami is a savoury, brothy, mouth filling taste, the quality of stock, parmesan or seaweed. In tea it comes mainly from amino acids, especially L theanine, concentrated in shaded leaf.

Where to find it

Shaded Japanese greens, gyokuro above all, then good sencha and matcha, are the classic umami teas. Quality shaded green can taste almost like a light savoury broth, see green tea and brewing green.

Why shading matters

Shading the plant before harvest raises amino acids and lowers astringency, which is the deliberate route to high umami. It is terroir and technique, not an additive, see harvest effects.

Brew cool to show it

Umami teas want clearly cooler water and a short steep; water that is too hot pulls out astringency that masks the savoury depth. This is why fine green is brewed gently, see the temperature guide.

Umami versus sweetness

Good shaded green reads as both savoury and sweet, with low astringency. Sweetness is bright and front of palate; umami is deep, gradual and lingers in the aftertaste. Learning to separate the two is a real palate milestone, see astringency.

L theanine link

The same L theanine behind umami is behind tea's relaxed, alert character, a neat connection between flavour and how green tea feels, see L theanine.

What it boils down to

Umami is the savoury, broth like depth of shaded green, from amino acids, best revealed by cool, short brewing. Perceiving it is a turning point in tasting, see the tasting guide.

In short: Umami in tea

Field	Detail
What umami is	The fifth basic taste; savoury, brothy, mouth-filling; comes from glutamate and related amino acids
Identified by	Japanese scientist Kikunae Ikeda in 1908; formally accepted as fifth basic taste in the 1980s
Where in tea	Highest in shade-grown Japanese green teas: gyokuro, matcha, kabusecha
Why shade-grown	Shading reduces photosynthesis and increases amino acid (especially L-theanine) accumulation; L-theanine produces the savoury character
How to taste it	Brew very cool (50-60C for gyokuro), drink slowly; umami emerges in the aftertaste rather than the front palate
Related to	L-theanine, the amino acid in all true tea but most concentrated in shade-grown green
In Western culinary terms	Closest experience: dashi (Japanese broth), aged parmesan, ripe tomato, mushroom stock

What to choose to taste umami

To taste umami at its clearest, look for shade-grown Japanese green: gyokuro is the strongest expression, then ceremonial matcha prepared properly, and a good sencha for everyday practice. Budget supermarket green bags do not carry it in quantity. Brew very cool (around 50-60C for gyokuro) and short, or boiling water destroys the very thing you are trying to taste. Browse the full tea shop; free UK delivery is over £35.

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teas · Start with the simplest umami tip here that fits your routine. Save the wider range of savoury greens for week two.

More tea reading

For broader tasting context see the practical tea tasting guide and the tea flavour wheel. For green tea context see the green tea overview, the what is matcha, and the Japanese tea tradition. For L-theanine context see the L-theanine ingredient guide. For brewing technique see the how to brew green tea.

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