First Flush vs Second Flush: What the Difference Tastes Like

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **First flush vs second flush, in summary:** First flush vs second flush: the harvest round predicts the cup. First is bright and delicate, second full and muscatel. How to taste and buy each.

"Flush" is one of the most useful words in fine tea: it is the harvest round, and it predicts the cup. This sits in the tasting cluster beside single origin vs blended.

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

What flush means

A flush is a flush of new growth the plant pushes out, harvested as a distinct picking. Successive flushes through the year taste meaningfully different from the same garden.

First flush

The first spring growth: typically bright, delicate, aromatic, lively and lighter bodied. Darjeeling first flush is the famous example, floral and brisk, prized and priced accordingly, see Darjeeling flushes.

Second flush

Later growth: fuller, rounder, more mature and often "muscatel" in Darjeeling, less delicate but more bodied and, to many, more satisfying as a cup, see black tea.

Why they differ

Growth speed, leaf maturity, temperature and the plant cycle change leaf chemistry between flushes, so terroir plus flush together set character, see processing.

Beyond Darjeeling

Flush matters across many origins. Assam has a celebrated, rich, malty second flush; Nepalese gardens follow a similar spring-then-summer arc; and it maps conceptually onto Japanese shincha (first picked

green) versus later harvests, see shincha and umami.

Which to choose

First flush for delicacy and aromatic complexity; second for body and rounded depth. Tasting them side by side is one of the best learning exercises in tea, see how to taste tea.

Quick take

Flush is the harvest round and a strong flavour predictor: first bright and delicate, second full and round. Knowing it lets you pick a character you'll enjoy, see the tasting guide.

First and second flush side by side

	First flush	Second flush
Season	First spring growth	Later growth (early summer)
Body	Lighter, lively	Fuller, rounder
Character	Bright, floral, aromatic	Mature, often muscatel
Darjeeling	Delicate, prized, dear	Muscatel, deeper, satisfying
Milk	No, drink clean	Usually no, can take a touch
Best for	Aromatic delicacy	Depth and weight

Common questions

Is first flush better than second? No. First is delicate and aromatic, second is full and round. Better depends on what you want from the cup.

Why is Darjeeling first flush so expensive? Small early yields, intense demand and short windows. Scarcity and prestige, not just quality, set the price.

Can I put milk in either? Generally no, especially first flush, which milk erases. Both are designed to be drunk clean.

Does flush apply to green tea? Conceptually yes: shincha is the first flush green, brighter than later harvests from the same garden.

Buying and brewing each flush

A first flush is delicate and fades fast, so freshness matters more than for a sturdier second flush: buy what you will drink while it is alive, keep it sealed, cool and dark, and treat the harvest date as information rather than decoration. Brew both just off the boil and drink them clean; a first flush brewed like a builders' tea reads as "weak" when it is simply different. On value, a characterful second flush is often the better buy than a prestige first flush, whose price is partly scarcity and demand rather than cup quality, so buy the flush whose character you actually want.

The bottom line

Flush is the harvest round and a strong flavour predictor: first bright and delicate, second full and round. Knowing it lets you buy the character you want rather than guess. Browse Darjeeling, first flush teas and the wider black tea range at teas.co.uk, or the full tea shop. Judge each flush by the cup and its description, keep an eye on what a cup costs, and note that free UK delivery starts over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Start with whichever flush you will actually drink, and see how it fits your week. The side by side tasting can wait until week two.

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