How to Make Chai From Scratch (Real Masala Chai)

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **How to make chai from scratch, in summary:** Real chai is simmered, not steeped: strong Assam and whole bruised spices boiled in milk and water, sweetened to taste. Not a syrup cafe latte.

Chai from scratch is simple, cheap and incomparably better than syrup based versions, once you know it is a simmered drink, not a steeped one. Sitting beside it in the tea making pages is tea lattes.

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

What real chai is

Traditional masala chai is strong black tea simmered with whole spices, milk and sweetener, not tea with a flavour syrup. The simmering is the technique, see chai vs masala chai.

The spices

Cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, black pepper, fresh ginger optional. Lightly crush whole spices for the best extraction; ground works but is less clean, see chai recipes.

The tea

A strong Assam style black is traditional and necessary, as it must stand up to spice and milk. A delicate tea disappears, see Assam.

The method

Simmer crushed spices in water a few minutes, add tea and simmer, add milk and bring back up, sweeten, strain. Simmering, not steeping, builds the depth, see brewing basics.

Milk and sweetener

Traditionally whole milk and a fair amount of sugar or jaggery; adjust to taste, oat milk works well, see best milk.

Common mistakes

Weak tea, not simmering, pre ground stale spice, or adding milk too early and scalding it. Strong tea, real simmer, fresh whole spice fixes all of them.

What it boils down to

Simmer whole spices, add strong black, then milk, then sweeten, then strain. Real chai is a five minute technique that beats any concentrate, see chai latte.

Chai from scratch, at a glance

Element	Rule
Tea	Strong black, Assam ideally; it must survive a simmer
Spices	Whole, bruised: cardamom, ginger, cloves, cinnamon, pepper
Method	Simmer spices and tea in water and milk, do not just steep
Sweetener	Integral to the style, but to taste, not by default
Not	A syrup-and-steamed-milk cafe chai latte; that is a different drink

Picks from the same corner: the chai range.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Spend less on prestige, more on freshness. Assam two months old makes better chai than a tin three years old.

More tea reading

- How to make masala chai
- Masala chai
- Assam tea
- Tea lattes

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