Sun Tea: The US Tradition and Safer Alternative

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Sun tea, in summary:** Sun tea is US 1970s home-brewing in a glass jar in sunlight; gentle cup but bacterial-growth risk; fridge cold-brew is the safer alternative.

Sun tea, steeping tea in a jar in sunlight, is a nostalgic summer method with a real safety footnote that responsible guides should not skip. It belongs with our other tea making guides, such as cold brew.

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

What sun tea is

Tea steeped slowly in a covered jar of water left in the sun for a few hours, giving a mellow, mild brew warmer than cold brew but gentler than hot.

The safety caveat

Sun tea sits at lukewarm temperatures that can let bacteria grow, especially over long periods or if the jar is not scrupulously clean. This is a real, commonly under stated point, not scaremongering, and it is not suitable for pregnant women, young children, the elderly or anyone with weakened defences, where the margin is too narrow.

How to do it more safely

Use an immaculately clean jar, fresh cold filtered water, keep it to no more than 3 to 4 hours, refrigerate immediately after, drink the same day, and discard if it looks ropy or smells off.

The safer alternative

Cold brew in the fridge (around 4C) gives a very similar mellow, smooth result without the lukewarm growth risk, and is clearly the better default, see cold brew.

If you make sun tea

Black or a sturdy herbal, plenty of leaf, sealed jar, short sun time, then straight to the fridge and strain. Treat it as same day only, see iced tea.

The flavour

Sun tea fans like its soft, rounded character; well made fridge cold brew is close and safer, see cold brew guide.

In a sentence

Sun tea is pleasant nostalgia with a real lukewarm bacteria caveat; keep it clean, short and same day, or use fridge cold brew for the same result more safely, see cold brew.

What you need to know: sun tea

Aspect	Note
What it is	Tea brewed in glass jar in direct sunlight over hours
Origin	US 1970s home-brewing tradition; Americana
Method	Glass jar + cold water + 4-5 tea bags + 3-5 hours sun
Cup character	Gentle cold-brew with mild aromatic depth
Safety caveat	Water temp stays in 20-40C bacterial growth zone; risk
Safer alternative	Cold-brew in fridge overnight; 4C inhibits bacteria
UK applicability	Limited; UK sun rarely reaches sustained brewing temperature
Read	Nostalgic tradition; cold-brew is the safer alternative

For a cup that suits cold brewing, browse the loose leaf range or the full tea shop.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · A small, reliable stash for iced tea beats a big, curious one. Rotate two or three iced teas you really enjoy.

More tea reading

Continue with cold brew tea, how to make iced tea and how to make tea.

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