

# Tea and the Environment: What Actually Counts

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

**Tea and the environment, in summary:** A UK guide to tea's environmental footprint: the kettle dominates per-cup carbon, supply chain still matters, what habit changes help most.

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Tea and the Environment: What Actually Counts. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-and-the-environment/>*

Tea's environmental footprint is real but often misrepresented in both directions. Here is the breakdown. This sits in the ethics cluster beside [is tea sustainable](#).

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

## Farming impact

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Farming impact, Tea and the Environment: What Actually Counts. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-and-the-environment/>*

Tea can be relatively low impact per cup compared with many drinks, but intensive monoculture, agrochemicals, soil and water pressure are real where it is grown poorly, see [organic tea](#).

## Land and biodiversity

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Land and biodiversity, Tea and the Environment: What Actually Counts. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-and-the-environment/>*

Plantation expansion has historically pressured forests and habitats in some regions; shade-grown plots preserve more than full-sun ones, and certification schemes target exactly this, see [Rainforest Alliance](#).

## The kettle is part of it

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The kettle is part of it, Tea and the Environment: What Actually Counts. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-and-the-environment/>*

A complete footprint includes use: boiling more water than you need is a recurring, avoidable energy cost, and on a UK grid it is often the single biggest per-cup contributor (roughly 50-100g CO2 just for the boil), larger than the tea itself, see [best kettle for tea](#).

## Packaging and waste

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](#). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Packaging and waste, Tea and the Environment: What Actually Counts. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-and-the-environment/>*

Plastic in some bags, mixed packaging and over wrapping are the most drinker visible and improvable impacts, see [plastic in tea bags](#) and [compostable bags](#).

## Transport

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](#). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Transport, Tea and the Environment: What Actually Counts. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-and-the-environment/>*

Shipping is usually a smaller share of tea footprint than farming or kettle energy, because bulk sea freight is so efficient; "food miles" alone is a weak proxy here.

## What genuinely helps

Boil only the water you need, choose loose leaf or verified plastic free bags, avoid waste, compost used bags, and support credibly certified transparent brands, see [loose leaf vs bags](#).

## The clear takeaway

Tea's environmental footprint is moderate and improvable; the biggest everyday levers are kettle energy and packaging waste, not vague guilt, see [is tea sustainable](#).

## The essentials: Tea's environmental footprint

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Element	Footprint detail
Tea growing	Plantation agriculture with associated land-use, pesticide use (varies), and water use; modest compared to coffee or cocoa per kilo
Processing	Energy for withering, firing, drying; small per-cup contribution
Transport	Sea freight from origin countries to UK; relatively low per-cup CO2 because of bulk efficiency
Packaging	Cardboard outer plus tea bag material; plastic content largely phased out by 2025
The kettle	Surprisingly significant; boiling water for one cup of tea uses 50-100g CO2 equivalent depending on grid mix

Element	Footprint detail
Waste	Used tea bags compost well; outer packaging mostly recyclable
How tea compares	Per cup, tea is lower carbon than coffee (especially espresso) or fizzy drinks; comparable to plain water boiled in a kettle

## Lower-footprint picks

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Lower-footprint picks, Tea and the Environment: What Actually Counts. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-and-the-environment/*

For certified, lower-footprint tea, [Clipper](#), [Pukka](#) or [Teapigs](#); [loose leaf](#) in larger packs cuts packaging, and used bags compost well. But the single biggest lever is your kettle: boil only what you need, and descale it. Browse the full [tea shop](#).

**FROM THE CURATOR** *teas* · Free UK delivery starts at £35, which is two or three good bags. Build a small order rather than a single splurge.

## More tea reading

For broader context see the [zero waste tea](#) guide and [is tea sustainable](#). For Fairtrade context see the [Fairtrade guide](#). For loose-leaf packaging-reduction see the [loose-leaf tea overview](#). For tea growing context see the [tea growing regions](#).

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## More from the tea wiki

- [Green tea](#)
- [Black tea](#)
- [Oolong tea](#)
- [White tea](#)
- [Herbal tea](#)
- [Caffeine in tea](#)
- [How to make tea properly](#)
- [Loose leaf vs teabag](#)

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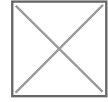
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