Why Is Tea Getting More Expensive?

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **The short version:** Tea is dearer for converging reasons: climate-hit harvests, cost inflation down the chain, and trade friction, showing as higher prices and shrinkflation.

Your tea really is dearer, and not only because of general inflation. This sits at the centre of the climate and cost cluster beside climate change and tea.

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

Price and climate details here follow public reporting to May 2026, with estimated figures that will move. Not financial advice.

Why tea is getting more expensive, at a glance

Factor	Read
Climate	Erratic weather has hit harvests in key growing regions
Cost inflation	Energy, freight, labour and packaging costs up down the whole chain
Trade & tariffs	Import costs and trade friction feed through to the shelf
How it shows	Higher prices and shrinkflation rather than empty shelves
What to do	Buy loose leaf, by cost per cup, in sensible quantities

The three pressures

Tea is dearer for a stack of ordinary pressures, not a single villain. Climate is the headline: erratic rainfall, heat and extreme weather in major growing regions, parts of East Africa and South Asia especially, have cut both harvest volumes and quality, and a perennial bush cannot simply be replanted for next quarter, so the shocks persist. Cost inflation down the whole chain is the second: energy, fertiliser, freight, labour and packaging have all risen, and tea is a low-margin commodity where those costs get passed through rather than absorbed. Trade and tariff friction is the third, adding cost and unpredictability at borders. See climate change and tea and tea tariffs.

A price story, not a shortage

Crucially, this shows up as higher prices and smaller packs, shrinkflation, rather than empty shelves. Global supply is strained, not collapsing: there is still plenty of tea, it simply costs more to grow, move and pack than it did. Saying that clearly matters, because tea-price stories are often written for alarm (your cuppa under threat) when the real picture is the unremarkable one, a price story, not a shortage story, and conflating the two produces needless panic. See will there be a shortage.

What to do: buy on cost per cup

Since the pressure is structural rather than about any one brand, the most effective response is the value lever this wiki keeps returning to. Judge by cost per cup, not pack price: a tea that looks dearer but uses less leaf and re-steeps can be cheaper per drink than a value tea binned bitter after one weak infusion. Buy loose leaf rather than bags, which strips out the per-bag packaging premium and the shipping of mostly air. Buy quantities you will drink while fresh, avoiding the false economy of a stale bulk bargain. And be willing to switch from a familiar premium box to an excellent less-famous tea. None of this reverses global commodity economics, but it materially softens the impact on your own cup. See sustainable buying.

How to read the next price-shock headline

It also helps to know how to read the next tea-price shock headline, because there will be one. Ask if it describes a real supply collapse (rare) or the now familiar mix of harvests hit by climate plus cost inflation along the chain, showing as price and pack size changes (usual), and treat shrinkflation as more likely than bare shelves. Separate the real signal, climate is a growing pressure on harvests and worth taking seriously, from the dramatised framing that you will not be able to buy tea next month.

What to buy

Stretch value with loose-leaf tea, which is usually cheaper per cup and re-steeps. For an everyday all-rounder buy black tea or browse the full tea shop and judge by the per-cup price.

Reference noted

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea (history)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Even at today's prices, one well brewed pot of good loose leaf beats five exotic bags drunk on the go.

More tea reading

- Why is tea expensive in Canada
- How to save money on tea
- Is tea sustainable

- Loose leaf vs tea bags

More from the tea wiki

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- White tea
- Herbal tea
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