Jam or Cream First? The Regional, Not Right, Answer

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Jam or cream first, in summary:** Jam or cream first is regional, not right or wrong: Devon is cream first, Cornwall jam first, both correct; the only error is insisting one order is universal.

It is one of Britain's most cheerfully heated food arguments, and the answer is that it is regional, not right or wrong. Within the afternoon tea pages it is paired with Devon vs Cornwall.

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

Quick reference: Devon vs Cornwall

Method	Order	Texture	Region
Devon	Clotted cream first, jam on top	Richer, softer spread	Devon
Cornwall	Jam first, cream on top	Firmer base, neat cream peak	Cornwall

The two camps, and why neither is wrong

This is one of Britain's most cheerfully heated food arguments, and the answer is that it is regional identity, not right or wrong. The Devon method is clotted cream first, then jam on top. The Cornish method is jam first, then cream on top. Both are deeply held local tradition, and the one real mistake is insisting that one order is universally correct, which turns a charming piece of regional culture into a fake rule of etiquette it never was. There is a real practical angle underneath the rivalry, and it is texture rather than correctness: jam first gives a firmer base and lets you finish with a neat peak of cream; cream first spreads richer and softer with the jam glossy over it. That is a real mouthfeel preference, which is why sensible people land on either side for reasons that have nothing to do with where they were born.

How to host it, and why people care so much

The host's move is simple and disarming: with mixed company, offer both jam and cream separately, name the two regional methods with a smile, and let everyone build their own, which converts a potential argument into a small piece of theatre. The order is a low-stakes proxy for regional pride, which is precisely why it is so endlessly searched and so enjoyable to argue: nobody really believes a cream tea is ruined by the wrong sequence, they enjoy the belonging the argument signals. Read as culture it is a pleasure; read as etiquette

it becomes the one really wrong thing you can do with a scone, which is to tell someone else theirs is wrong. See how to host.

What actually makes a great scone, in either order

The order matters far less than the build, so be specific about what does matter. The scone should be fresh and ideally still slightly warm, with a soft, light crumb, neither dense nor dry; break it open with your hands rather than cutting it, which keeps the texture and is itself part of the tradition. Use a proper fruit jam with a good set, strawberry or raspberry by custom, and authentic clotted cream rather than whipped or squirty, because the thick, almost buttery texture is the whole point of a West Country cream tea. Top each half mouthful by mouthful so the last bite is as good as the first, and pair it with a brisk black tea, an Assam or a breakfast blend, that cuts the richness, see tea with scones. Get those right and a Devon build and a Cornish build are both excellent; get them wrong and no amount of "correct" ordering rescues it.

What to buy

Set a proper cream tea around the cup: a brisk English Breakfast or another sturdy black tea to cut the richness, or browse the wider loose leaf range. The full tea shop has the full range, and UK delivery is free over £35.

Reference noted

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea (beverage)

Afternoon-tea reading

- Devon vs Cornwall cream tea
- Tea with scones
- How to host an afternoon tea
- About afternoon tea

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Jam or cream first, count what the tea costs per cup. For the pot, loose leaf usually wins and a decent bag sometimes does.

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- Green tea
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