Purple Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Purple tea, in summary:** Purple tea is a mutant Camellia sinensis variety from Kenya with anthocyanin-purple leaves; light cup, moderate caffeine, modest evidence behind.

Unlike most "colour" teas, purple tea really is tea. This sits in the novelty cluster beside butterfly pea.

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

This purple tea page offers general information, not medical advice, and novelty botanicals differ in evidence and regulation. Local rules change, so check them, and anyone pregnant, medicated or unsure should ask a pharmacist about purple tea first.

The essentials: purple tea

Aspect	The note
What it is	Tea from a mutant Camellia sinensis variety with purple-pigmented leaves
Where it comes from	Mostly Kenya (developed at Tea Research Foundation of Kenya); some Japan
The purple colour	Anthocyanin pigments (same as in blueberries, red cabbage)
Cup colour	Pale purple-pink when brewed; lemon shifts it pink
Taste	Light, slightly sweet, woody-floral; lower in tannin than black tea
Caffeine	Moderate, around 30-40mg per cup (lower than black tea)
Marketing claim	"Superfood"; the anthocyanins are real but modest
UK availability	Niche but growing; speciality online and some health-food shops

What it is, and where it comes from

Unlike most "colour" teas, purple tea is true tea, and it is worth being plain because the superfood marketing has run ahead of the substance. The plant is a naturally-occurring mutant of Camellia sinensis (the same true-tea plant behind green, black, white and oolong) whose leaves carry unusually high levels of anthocyanin pigments, the compounds that colour blueberries, red cabbage and aubergines. The variety was noticed in Assam in the 1980s and developed for commercial growing by the Tea Research Foundation of Kenya from the 1990s, reaching small Western markets around 2010; production now centres on Kenya, mostly the Nandi Hills, with smaller amounts from India and Japan, and the leaf is processed lightly, oxidised minimally to keep the purple colour. The dry leaf is purple tinged rather than green, and the brewed cup is a

pale purple pink that shifts toward pink with a squeeze of lemon, the same pH chemistry as butterfly pea but in a base of real tea, see what counts as tea.

Taste, caffeine, brewing, and the evidence

The cup is light, slightly sweet, with woody and faintly floral notes; the tannin is lower than black tea and the caffeine moderate, around 30 to 40mg per cup. Brew with just-off-boil water (90 to 95C), a teaspoon per 200ml, a single two-to-four-minute steep, and serve it neat, milk dulls the colour and is unnecessary while lemon shifts it dramatically pink, see water temperature. On the evidence, anthocyanins are interesting compounds with a modest story, but the "superfood" framing is overstated: a cup delivers small amounts, much less than a portion of blueberries at the same cost, so any effect is modest and not unique to purple tea, see tea myths debunked.

The Kenyan smallholder story

Purple tea matters more in its Kenyan industry context than the superfood marketing makes clear. Kenya is the world's largest exporter of black tea by volume and the main source of the CTC blend that fills British supermarket teabags, an industry concentrated in mass-market commodity tea where smallholder prices have been under long-term pressure. Purple tea was developed at the Tea Research Foundation of Kenya specifically as a higher-value alternative crop, about twenty years of breeding to give producers a speciality-tier product that commands better prices and helps stabilise incomes; several Kenyan companies and cooperatives now produce it for export, often with Fairtrade or direct-trade certification. Buying purple tea from credible Kenyan-sourced sellers therefore supports exactly the smallholder diversification it was created for, one of the more positive supply-chain stories in mainstream tea, see Kenyan tea.

What to buy

Source a credible Kenyan-sourced purple tea, or browse the wider Kenyan tea selection and the full tea shop; free UK delivery over £35.

Reference noted

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · If purple tea sounds appealing, try a pot once. One cup of purple tea tells you more than twenty articles.

Novelty-tea reading

- Butterfly pea (blue tea)
- What counts as tea

- Kenyan tea
- Tea myths debunked

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