Tea Troubleshooting FAQ

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tea troubleshooting FAQ, in summary:** A UK guide to fixing bad tea: bitter, weak, flat, stewed, cloudy, spinach-tasting green. Most problems are brewing variables, not tea quality.

Almost every "bad tea" problem has a simple cause. It sits alongside the ultimate guide to making tea.

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

Problem	The fix
Bitter tea	Lower water temperature (especially green); shorter steep; less leaf
Weak tea	More leaf (1+ tsp per cup); longer steep (4-5 min for black)
Flat or dull tea	Fresh-drawn water; full boil not reboiled; check leaf freshness
Cloudy tea	Usually harmless "tea cream" from minerals; more common in hard water
Stewed taste	Remove leaves at proper time; don't leave brewing endlessly
Green tea tastes like spinach	Water was too hot; use 70-80C and shorter steep
Tea with milk goes greenish-grey	Brewed too weak; add tea, brew stronger before milk
Tea smells musty	Old or stored badly; check storage tin, replace if needed
Tea tastes metallic	Possibly water quality (chlorine, minerals) or kettle limescale
Tea cools too quickly	Use ceramic mug not metal; pre-warm pot; thicker-walled vessel
Tea looks oily on top	Normal "tea slick" from tannins; not a fault
Tea makes me jittery	Too strong, too much caffeine; lighter tea, decaf, or herbal

Four variables behind almost every fault

Almost every "bad tea" complaint comes down to one of four things: water, temperature, steeping time and quantity of leaf. Bitterness, weakness, flatness and a stewed taste are brewing faults, not bad luck or a bad brand, so the reliable approach is to name the problem, adjust the one variable behind it, and brew again. Changing brand rarely helps and quietly costs money; adjusting the variable works almost every time. See how to make tea properly.

Bitter and weak: the two most common

Bitterness is over-extraction. The usual causes are water too hot (green tea scorched at a full boil), too long a steep, or too much leaf. Drop green tea to 70 to 80C, keep black tea to three to five minutes and green to one or two, and use about a heaped teaspoon per cup; naturally astringent teas like Assam want the shorter end of the range. Weakness is the opposite, under-extraction, and across British kitchens the real culprit is almost always under-quantity: a level teaspoon where a heaped one is needed. Heap the spoon, give it the full time for the type, and make sure the kettle reaches a genuine rolling boil for black tea. Stale tea (more than a year old, or stored loose in a cupboard) also reads as weak and lifeless, so replace it and keep it in an airtight tin. See ideal water temperatures.

The other usual suspects

The rest of the common complaints each have one obvious cause:

- **Green tea tastes "like spinach":** the water was too hot. Cooler water (70 to 80C) and a shorter steep fix it almost every time.
- **Flat or dull:** reboiled or heavily chlorinated water, or stale leaf. Use fresh-drawn water, filter it in chlorinated areas, and rotate your stock.
- **Cloudy:** usually harmless "tea cream", minerals binding with tannins as the cup cools, common in hard-water areas. Drink it hotter, or use softer water if it bothers you.
- **Stewed:** the leaves were left in too long. Remove the bag, or decant the pot, on time.
- **Metallic:** often chlorinated water or kettle limescale. Filter the water and descale the kettle.

See green tea.

What to buy

To replace stale stock, a fresh bag of Yorkshire Tea, PG Tips or loose-leaf tea kept in an airtight tin clears most freshness faults. In hard-water or heavily chlorinated areas a water filter helps, and a variable-temperature kettle makes green tea foolproof. Buy on the cup and the per cup price, never the marketing; free UK delivery is over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Freshness beats provenance for most drinkers. Buy a smaller bag more often.

Brewing reading

- Ultimate guide to making tea
- How to brew every type of tea
- Tea myths debunked
- Green tea
- Tea for beginners

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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