

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.

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Tea Troubleshooting FAQ. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-troubleshooting-faq/>*

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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Four variables behind almost every fault, Tea Troubleshooting FAQ. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-troubleshooting-faq/>*

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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](#). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Bitter and weak: the two most common, Tea Troubleshooting FAQ. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-troubleshooting-faq/>*

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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](#). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The other usual suspects, Tea Troubleshooting FAQ. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-troubleshooting-faq/>*

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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](#). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What to buy, Tea Troubleshooting FAQ. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tea-troubleshooting-faq/>*

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.

Reference noted

- [EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine \(2015\)](#)

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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](#)

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