Kukicha Twig Tea: Light, Sweet and Low in Caffeine

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Kukicha, in summary:** A light, mildly sweet tea made from stems and twigs rather than leaf. A deliberate, distinctive drink, not a leftover, and naturally low in caffeine without being caffeine-free.

Kukicha turns the parts most teas discard into a delicate cup. It sits at the gentle end of the Japanese family beside bancha.

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

What kukicha is

Kukicha is tea made largely from stems, stalks and twigs rather than leaf, and the important point is that this is deliberate, not a compromise. A finer version made from high-grade gyokuro or sencha stems is called karigane. The cup is light, mildly sweet, creamy and low in bitterness, which makes it one of the easiest green teas to drink. It earns a place in the cupboard for three plain reasons: it is forgiving to brew so it survives a distracted kitchen, it is naturally lower in caffeine so it works late in the day, and it is inexpensive, especially when re-steeped, so it is a low-risk way to widen a tea routine.

Aspect	Answer
What it is	Tea from stems, stalks, twigs (karigane = fine gyokuro/sencha stem)
Taste	Light, mildly sweet, creamy, low bitterness
Caffeine	Naturally low (stems hold less), not zero
Roasted style	Toasty, hojicha-like, lower still in caffeine
Brew	Moderate temperature, short steep, forgiving
Who it suits	Delicate low-caffeine real tea, later in the day

Green or roasted

The same stems can become two quite different drinks. Left green, kukicha is pale, sweet and creamy. Roasted, it crosses into hojicha territory, turning nutty, toasty and warm, with the roast driving off some of what little caffeine the stems held. Neither is more authentic than the other; they are two settings of a processing dial, and choosing between them is a flavour decision (light and grassy sweet versus toasted and

mellow) rather than a quality one. The roasted style makes a particularly good evening cup, because stem material plus roasting pushes the caffeine to the low end while keeping a satisfying body.

Naturally low in caffeine, not none

This is kukicha's single most useful property, and also the one most often inflated, so it is worth stating carefully. Caffeine concentrates in young leaves and buds; stems carry markedly less, so a tea that is mostly stem really is lower in caffeine than a leaf green. That is a real, mechanism-based reduction rather than a marketing flourish. But lower is not none: kukicha is still true tea and still contains some caffeine, so anyone avoiding caffeine for a medical reason should treat it as reduced rather than free, and check with a professional if it matters. For most people wanting a gentle late afternoon or early evening cup, that real reduction is exactly enough. See caffeine in tea for the wider picture.

Choosing and brewing it

Choosing kukicha is a two-question decision: green or roasted, and standard or karigane. Green suits a light, sweet daytime cup; roasted suits the evening; karigane, the premium grade, is worth it if you want some shaded sweetness and umami in a lower-caffeine form, and it rewards the same cooler brewing as the gyokuro it came from. Brewing is the easy part. Water around 70 to 80C and a short steep gives the cleanest, sweetest cup; kukicha tolerates slightly hotter water than delicate leaf greens because stems throw less harsh bitterness, but a hard boil still flattens its sweetness, so keep it off the boil. It re-steeps well for a few consistent infusions, which quietly improves an already low cost per cup, and it needs no milk or sugar because the natural stem sweetness carries it. See ideal water temperatures for the detail.

Reference noted

- NHS guidance on caffeine

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Japanese-tea reading

Continue with kukicha explained, hojicha, bancha, sencha, the green tea reference and the Japanese tea hub.

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