# Yabukita: Japan's Workhorse Tea Cultivar

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Yabukita, in summary:** Japan's dominant tea cultivar at 70 to 75% of plantings, the balanced workhorse behind most sencha and the reference baseline for what Japanese green tea tastes like.

If you have drunk Japanese green tea, you have very likely drunk Yabukita. This sits in the cultivar cluster beside samidori.

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

## What Yabukita is

Yabukita is by far the most widely planted Japanese tea cultivar, the default backbone of most sencha and around 70 to 75% of all Japanese tea plantings. It was selected by Hikosaburo Sugiyama, a tea farmer in Shizuoka who picked out exceptional plants from his fields for their vigour, cold hardiness and balanced flavour, and it was formally registered as a cultivar in 1953. Through the following decades it progressively replaced traditional seedling-grown bushes across Japan as its reliability proved itself. In the cup it gives a balanced, recognisably "classic" Japanese green profile, grassy, fresh, moderately sweet and umami, which is precisely why it is the baseline that named single-cultivar teas are judged against. See green tea for the wider category.

| Aspect | Answer |
|---|---|
| What it is | Japan's dominant tea cultivar; backbone of most Japanese green tea |
| Share of Japan | ~70-75% of Japanese tea plantings; close to monoculture status |
| Created | Selected by Hikosaburo Sugiyama; registered 1953 |
| Genetic origin | Selection from existing tea bushes; lineage from Camellia sinensis var. sinensis |
| Best growing regions | Shizuoka, Kagoshima, Mie, broad climatic tolerance across Japan |
| Flavour signature | Balanced umami, fresh grassy notes, moderate astringency, clean finish |
| Tea types produced | Sencha (predominant), bancha, hojicha base, occasionally matcha |
| Harvest timing | Mid-season cultivar; first flush typically late April-early May |
| Strengths | Cold-hardy, productive, balanced flavour, versatile across regions |
| Limitations | Monoculture risk; less distinctive than premium cultivars; pest susceptibility |

| Aspect | Answer |
|---|---|
| Compared to Saemidori | Yabukita = balanced workhorse; Saemidori = early-harvest premium |
| Compared to Okumidori | Yabukita = mid-season; Okumidori = late-season fuller body |
| Framing | The reliable backbone cultivar; not exotic but consistently good |

## Why it dominates

The 70 to 75% share reflects real, practical advantages rather than habit. Yabukita is cold-hardy and tolerates Japan's climate variability, including spring frost risk, which lets it produce consistently across Honshu and beyond. Its yield is economically competitive, and it is versatile: one cultivar makes good sencha, acceptable bancha and a decent hojicha base, so it serves several product lines at once. Its leaves handle steaming and rolling reliably, giving a predictable final character, and its umami-fresh-astringent balance suits everyday Japanese green tea. In short, it is the rational economic choice for most growers; the quality gap against premium cultivars is real but modest, and the price difference justifies the dominant choice.

## How it tastes

Yabukita's profile is what most UK drinkers picture as "Japanese green tea", precisely because it dominates the category. The liquor is a pale yellow-green, bright and clean. The aroma is fresh grass with marine, seaweed undertones and a light vegetal sweetness. The taste is a balanced umami (less intense than premium cultivars), grassy freshness and moderate astringency in the finish, clean and consistent rather than complex, with a light to medium body. Against its alternatives, Saemidori gives more pronounced umami sweetness, Asatsuyu a lighter and more delicate profile, and Okumidori a fuller body, while Yabukita sits squarely in the balanced middle. It is also more forgiving of brewing variation than premium cultivars, harder to ruin with a slight over-steep, which is part of its everyday reliability.

## The monoculture concern

Yabukita's dominance creates legitimate concerns the Japanese tea industry works to manage. When one cultivar dominates, a pathogen or pest that targets it can hit yields hard, and that genetic uniformity also narrows the options for adapting to a shifting climate. There is a flavour cost too: when most Japanese green tea is a single cultivar, the rich genetic diversity of Japanese tea is underexpressed in commercial product. The response is active: prefectures and breeders promote alternative cultivars such as Saemidori, Yutakamidori and Okumidori, and some areas incentivise diversification. The concern is real but managed, and Yabukita itself is not the problem; UK drinkers can support diversity simply by trying an alternative-cultivar tea now and then.

## Using it as a buyer

Treat Yabukita as your reference point. When you buy a standard Japanese sencha with no cultivar stated, expect Yabukita or a Yabukita-dominant blend, and that is your baseline for Japanese green tea taste. Trying named alternative-cultivar teas (Saemidori, Asatsuyu, Okumidori) against that baseline is the quickest way to learn what cultivar variation actually means in the cup. Region matters within the cultivar, too:

Shizuoka and Kagoshima are both Yabukita-heavy but give different regional character, so terroir is still a variable. When a vendor specifically names a non-Yabukita cultivar, that signals craft attention rather than a guarantee of quality. The one thing to ignore is any vendor selling Yabukita as exotic or premium-by-name; it is the standard, and that is exactly its value. Explore Japanese sencha or the wider Japanese green tea range to start.

### Reference noted


- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health


FROM THE CURATOR

*teas* · Pick sencha by the cup, not by the cultivar on the label. Explore rarer cultivars once your own taste is clear.

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