Qing Xin: Taiwan's Gold Standard Oolong Cultivar

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Qing Xin cultivar, in summary:** Qing Xin ("clear heart") is the gold-standard cultivar of premium Taiwanese oolong: floral and elegant, peachy and creamy, and especially refined when grown above about 1,500m.

Qing Xin is the cultivar behind some of Taiwan's most celebrated oolongs. This sits in the cultivar cluster beside the Tieguanyin cultivar.

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

What Qing Xin is

Qing Xin ("clear heart") is a key Taiwanese oolong cultivar, central to high-mountain (gao shan) oolong. It originated in Fujian, China, and was brought to Taiwan in the late nineteenth century as the island developed its own oolong industry; over the following century growers selected and refined it for the high-mountain terroir until it became the dominant cultivar in the premium gao shan areas. Its distinguishing traits are relatively slow growth, which produces concentrated leaf, an elegant aromatic profile of orchid-floral and peach-cream notes, a high sensitivity to elevation, and good resistance to common tea-plant pests. It is prized for finesse over power. See oolong tea for the wider style.

Aspect	Note
Name	Qing Xin ("clear heart"); also Bei Pu Wu Long
Origin	Native Chinese cultivar; widely planted in Taiwan
Used for	Premium Taiwanese oolongs, especially gao shan high-mountain
Distinguishing trait	Floral elegance; the gold-standard Taiwanese oolong cultivar
Famous teas	Lao Cha (aged Qing Xin), Lishan, Alishan
Altitude interaction	Especially elegant at 1,500m+ elevation
Caveat	Cultivar is one signal; producer, season, processing matter too
Buying signal	Mid-to-premium Taiwanese oolong; explicit cultivar naming

How altitude shapes the cup

The altitude interaction is real and is much of what makes Qing Xin special. At around 800m it produces a competent but unremarkable oolong; at 1,500m the same cultivar gains meaningfully more aromatic complexity; and at 2,000m and above, in the highest commercial areas like Lishan, it produces some of the most refined oolong cups available anywhere, with floral aromatics that develop across many gongfu steeps in a way no other cultivar quite matches. The practical upshot is a clear buying signal: a pack that names both Qing Xin and a high elevation Taiwanese region, Alishan, Lishan or Shan Lin Xi, is pointing to a really premium oolong.

How it tastes, and the other cultivars

The dry leaf is rolled tightly into small dark-green balls, the classic gao shan format, which unfurl dramatically across successive steeps into whole leaf and bud. The wet aroma reveals the Qing Xin signature: bright orchid and lilac florals layered with peach, light cream and a slight buttery undertone, over a pale gold to amber liquor. Early steeps emphasise the florals, the middle steeps the creamy peach, and the later steeps a sweet, lingering minerality, with a good gao shan giving 8 to 12 distinct cups before the leaf is spent. Among Taiwanese cultivars it is the gold standard for elegance: Jin Xuan ("Golden Lily", the milk oolong cultivar) is its creamier, richer cousin from a 1980s variety; Cui Yu ("Jade Green") is more vegetal; Si Ji Chun ("Four Seasons Spring") is productive and floral but less refined; and Hong Yu ("Ruby") and TTES #18 are black-tea cultivars rather than oolong ones.

Aged Qing Xin (Lao Cha) and brewing

One especially interesting use is aged Taiwanese oolong (Lao Cha). Well-stored Qing Xin gao shan, typically aged 10 to 30 years in stable, humidity-controlled conditions, develops a deep amber colour and a mellow profile in which the original florals evolve into honey, dried stone fruit and faint chocolate, with a smoother, fuller body. It is one of the more under-appreciated aged-tea categories outside pu-erh. To brew fresh gao shan well, use 5 to 6g of leaf in a 100ml gaiwan with just-off-boil water (around 95C, not a full rolling boil), rinse briefly and discard, then run short successive steeps (15s, 20s, 30s, 40s and beyond). Aged Lao Cha suits slightly longer steeps, starting around 25 to 30s. Western brewing works but loses the layered character that justifies the cultivar; a small gaiwan is the tool that lets it show what it can do.

The caveat: cultivar is one signal

A pack labelled "Qing Xin Taiwanese oolong" tells you something useful about what to expect, but the cultivar alone does not guarantee a great cup. The other variables matter just as much: the producer and their craft, the season (spring is most prized, winter close behind, summer clearly weaker), the elevation, the oxidation level (lightly oxidised is the classic style), and the freshness of the leaf, since delicate gao shan stales faster than darker oolongs. A pack that names Qing Xin without the estate, season, elevation and harvest year is signalling less than it could; one that names all five tells you everything you need. Cultivar is the headline; the full label is what gets you from headline-good to actually-good. See how to judge tea quality.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Tea consumption and cardiovascular outcomes meta-analysis

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