

Tieguanyin: The Cultivar and the Tea

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

Tieguanyin, in summary: Both a Fujian cultivar AND the famous Anxi oolong made from it. Green versus roasted styles, real cultural heritage, and a gongfu brewing approach that rewards the leaf.

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Tieguanyin: The Cultivar and the Tea. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tieguanyin-cultivar/>*
Tieguanyin is confusingly both a plant and a famous tea, so here is the distinction. This sits in the cultivar cluster beside [qing xin](#).

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

Cultivar and tea: two meanings

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Cultivar and tea: two meanings , Tieguanyin: The Cultivar and the Tea. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tieguanyin-cultivar/>*

Tieguanyin ("Iron Goddess of Mercy") is both a specific oolong cultivar and the famous Anxi oolong, from Fujian, traditionally made from it. As a cultivar, Tieguanyin (???) is an identifiable plant lineage with characteristic leaves and flavour potential that can be planted anywhere with a suitable climate. As a tea, "Tieguanyin" means oolong made from that cultivar following Anxi tradition, which needs Anxi terroir, Anxi processing skill and the Anxi cultivar together. That is why the same cultivar grown elsewhere produces a "Tieguanyin-style" tea rather than authentic Anxi Tieguanyin. In China, "Anxi Tieguanyin" carries protected-origin recognition; outside it, the name is used loosely. For a UK buyer the practical rule is simple: a tea labelled just "Tieguanyin" might be the cultivar grown anywhere, while "Anxi Tieguanyin" with a village or producer named is more likely the real thing. See [oolong tea](#).

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Aspect	Answer
What it is	Both a specific cultivar AND the famous oolong tea made from it
Name meaning	"Iron Goddess of Mercy" (Iron Bodhisattva); refers to Buddhist deity Guanyin

Aspect	Answer
Origin region	Anxi County, Fujian Province, China
Cultivar age	Roughly 250+ years old; discovered c. 18th century
Tea category	Oolong (partially oxidised); 10-50% oxidation depending on style
Two main styles	Modern green-style (low oxidation, light) vs traditional roasted (higher oxidation, dark)
Flavour signature	Floral orchid, creamy, distinctive long sweet finish, mineral undertones
Famous reputation	One of China's most-celebrated oolongs; "national tea" status
The distinction	Tieguanyin cultivar grown elsewhere produces "Tieguanyin-style" not authentic Anxi TGY
Brewing	95C, gongfu approach; small Yixing or gaiwan; many short infusions
Modern green style	Now dominates retail; light floral, less storage tolerance
Traditional roasted	Re-emerging in premium market; storage-friendly; complex roasted character
Cost	Authentic Anxi: GBP 30-150+/100g; mass-market versions GBP 10-30
Framing	Genuine cultivar/tea pair; understand both layers; buy from reputable Chinese specialist

The two processing styles

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Tieguanyin exists in two dominant styles with genuinely different cups. The modern green style (qing xiang) uses low oxidation, around 15 to 25%, with little or no roasting: bright green leaves, a light floral orchid character, high aromatic intensity, a simpler finish and a limited storage life of six to twelve months. It has dominated retail since the 1990s. The traditional roasted style (nong xiang) uses higher oxidation, around 30 to 50%, plus substantial charcoal or electric roasting: dark twisted leaves, a warming roasted character over the underlying floral notes, a complex layered finish, and storage that improves over years. Many writers see the green style as a fashion-driven simplification of a more complex craft; others value it on its own terms. Both can be excellent or mediocre, and trying both is the best way to understand the range. See [tea oxidation](#).

How authentic Tieguanyin tastes

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for How authentic Tieguanyin tastes , Tieguanyin: The Cultivar and the Tea. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tieguanyin-cultivar/*

Quality Tieguanyin, green or roasted, shares core traits worth recognising. The liquor runs light yellow-green in the green style and golden to amber when roasted. The aroma is a distinctive, genuine orchid floral, with the roasted style adding toasted depth. On the palate it has the creamy, almost oily mouthfeel that defines high-grade Tieguanyin, a floral sweetness, mineral undertones from the Fujian terroir, and a long aftertaste

the Chinese call "hou yun", a throat-charm that extends for minutes after swallowing. That long sweet finish is a real signature, not a marketing claim. It rewards the gongfu method, where many short infusions reveal the layers, giving 8 to 12 cups from good leaf; western brewing works but misses much of the depth.

The "Iron Goddess" name

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The "Iron Goddess" name*, *Tieguanyin: The Cultivar and the Tea*. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tieguanyin-cultivar/>

The name carries genuine cultural weight. One traditional account tells of a poor farmer who looked after a neglected temple to Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, and was shown a tea plant in a dream, from which Tieguanyin came. The "iron" element is usually explained by the heaviness of the well-grown leaves, which are notably dense, or by the dark colour of the original roasted-style leaf. The English "Iron Goddess of Mercy" is the standard translation, though "Iron Bodhisattva" is more accurate, since Guanyin is a bodhisattva rather than a goddess, and "TGY" is the common shorthand in the tea community. The name is worth respecting as heritage without buying any mysticism with it.

How to brew it

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for How to brew it*, *Tieguanyin: The Cultivar and the Tea*. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tieguanyin-cultivar/>

Brewing makes a real difference here. A gaiwan (a porcelain lidded bowl) gives the cleanest flavour, while a Yixing clay pot develops character over time and pairs traditionally; an ordinary teapot is fine for casual drinking. For gongfu, use a generous 5 to 7g of leaf in a 100ml vessel, with water at 95 to 100C (full boil for roasted, just off the boil for green), a short first infusion of 15 to 30 seconds, then gradually longer steps across 8 to 12 productive infusions as the flavour evolves. For western brewing, around 3g per 200ml at 85 to 90C for three to four minutes gives two or three cups. It also cold-brews well overnight for a smooth, sweet result. On storage, green-style needs cool, sealed storage and fairly quick drinking, while roasted-style keeps longer and can improve. See [gongfu brewing at home](#).

Reference noted

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- [PubMed: Tannins and non-haem iron absorption](#)

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