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.

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

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.

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
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

Aspect	Answer
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

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

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

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

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 steeps 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

- PubMed: Tannins and non-haem iron absorption

For the matching kit, the loose leaf range and worldwide teas.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Per-cup price is the only price that matters. Loose leaf usually wins; supermarket bags sometimes do too.

More on tea cultivars

- What is a tea cultivar
- Qing Xin cultivar
- Oolong tea
- Wuyi rock tea
- Fujian tea region
- Gongfu brewing

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.

