Da Bai: The Big Bud White Tea Cultivar

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Da Bai cultivar, in summary:** Da Bai ("big white") is the large-budded Fujian cultivar behind classic Silver Needle and Bai Mudan: necessary for the style, but not a guarantee of quality on its own.

Da Bai is the plant behind the most famous white teas. This sits in the cultivar cluster beside what is a tea cultivar.

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

What Da Bai is

Da Bai, literally "big white", refers to the large-budded Fujian cultivars prized for the downy, silvery buds that classic white tea requires. Those plump buds are exactly what high-grade Silver Needle (Bai Hao Yin Zhen) and Bai Mudan are made from, and they give white tea its delicate, hay-sweet, soft character, so the cultivar enables the style rather than merely flavouring it. Region matters alongside the plant: the Fuding and Zhenghe areas of Fujian are the classic homes, and cultivar plus place plus careful drying together make the grade. See white tea for the category and silver needle for the flagship style.

Aspect	Da Bai ("big white")
What it is	large budded Fujian cultivars selected for downy, silvery buds
What it makes	classic Silver Needle (Bai Hao Yin Zhen) and Bai Mudan white tea
Why it matters	the plump, downy buds are exactly what high grade white tea needs
Classic homes	Fuding and Zhenghe areas of Fujian
The caveat	necessary for the style, not a guarantee: place and processing decide the grade

Necessary, not sufficient

The single most important point is that the plant is necessary but not sufficient. A tea sold as "Silver Needle" from the wrong cultivar, or made carelessly, is simply not the same tea, because cultivar, place and processing finish the cup together. So treat the cultivar name on a label as a useful hint about flavour direction, not a grade. It shows what the Da Bai plant was bred to do, which helps when choosing a white tea, but weigh it with what finishes the cup: growing place, processing, freshness and your own taste. A famous cultivar grown carelessly or dried badly is not rescued by its reputation, and many fine teas are

skilful blends rather than single-cultivar, which is normal rather than a deception.

Why the cultivar matters here

Da Bai earns a page because it explains, concretely, why real Silver Needle looks and tastes as it does, and why cheaper imitations differ. The plump, downy, silvery bud is a property of the plant first, before any processing skill is applied, so a tea sold as Silver Needle from a different plant cannot present the same way however carefully it is made. That turns "why is this one so much better" from a mystery into a checkable chain of plant, place and processing. It is also a clear illustration of why the cultivar layer is real knowledge rather than jargon: a cultivar is a real, propagated plant selected for concrete traits, and those traits have measurable consequences in the cup, which is exactly why two white teas from the same region can taste very different.

Variety and cultivar

One distinction worth keeping straight: beneath the named cultivars sit the two major botanical varieties. Var. sinensis is small leaved, happy in cool air and altitude, and leans delicate; var. assamica is large leaved, tropical and vigorous, and leans toward strength. That division sets the broad palette before processing does anything, and cultivars such as Da Bai are the named, selected plants within it, here a sinensis-side Fujian selection bred specifically for big, downy buds. Holding "variety" and "cultivar" apart is not pedantry: it is what stops a famous plant name being read as a quality certificate. See what counts as tea.

Want to buy a good one?

Look for a real Fujian Silver Needle or Bai Mudan, and judge it in the cup, not by the Da Bai name. Browse the white tea range, the silver needle range or the full tea shop. Choose Da Bai teas by the cup and the per cup price, not by marketing; UK delivery on white tea is free over £35.

Browse the tea range

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