Yame: Japan's Other Great Gyokuro Region

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Yame tea, in summary:** A premium Japanese tea region in Kyushu that rivals Uji for gyokuro, built on the misty Hoshino-mura valleys, traditional shading and small family producers. Quiet prestige, often at better value.

Yame is less famous than Uji but revered for gyokuro. This sits in the terroir cluster beside Uji.

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Where it is, and what makes it different

Yame City sits in Fukuoka Prefecture in northern Kyushu, the southernmost main Japanese island, in mountainous interior away from coastal influence. It is a smaller region with an outsized reputation for fine tea, accounting for only around 3% of Japanese production by volume but skewed heavily towards the premium end by value. Its distinctiveness is real: persistent morning fogs roll through the valleys, giving a natural shading effect that complements deliberate shading, while mild Kyushu winters reduce frost risk and warm, humid summers support steady growth. Tea grows at 100 to 500m on varied slopes. Within Yame, the higher-elevation sub-area of Hoshino-mura ("star village", named for its clear mountain night skies) provides particularly favourable conditions for the finest gyokuro. See green tea for the wider category.

Aspect	Answer
Where it is	Yame City, Fukuoka Prefecture, Kyushu, southern Japan
Why famous	Premium Japanese tea region; particular distinction for gyokuro production
Gyokuro reputation	Hoshino-mura village within Yame produces Japan's most-celebrated gyokuro
Share of Japan	~3% of total Japanese tea production by volume; premium-skewed by value
Climate	Mountainous Kyushu; mild winters, warm humid summers; persistent morning mists
Elevation	Tea grown 100-500m; mountainous valleys with morning fog
Key tea types	Gyokuro (signature), traditional gyokuro hoshino, sencha, kabusecha
Hoshino-mura	"Star village"; specific Yame sub-area for finest gyokuro
National competition wins	Yame producers consistently win Japanese national gyokuro competitions

Aspect	Answer
Traditional shading	Rice straw mats over bamboo frames; hand-applied; multi-week duration
Compared to Uji gyokuro	Yame is rival for highest-quality gyokuro; some say superior
Cost	Premium Yame gyokuro GBP 60-200+/100g; competition-grade higher
Framing	A real premium region; producers smaller and less internationally known than Uji

Why Yame excels at gyokuro

Yame's gyokuro reputation rests on several converging factors. The humid, foggy climate supports the extended shading that the finest gyokuro needs (three to four weeks) without the plant stress that would compromise quality. Many Yame producers maintain traditional shading with rice-straw mats over bamboo frames, hand-applied and gradually reducing the light, an approach many tasters find produces a more refined gyokuro than modern synthetic shade netting. The producers themselves are mostly small family operations running for decades or centuries, with close attention to traditional methods and less commercial pressure to compromise. They favour gyokuro-suited cultivars such as Saemidori, Yamakai and Asahi over the standard Yabukita, and they consistently win the Japanese national gyokuro competitions, often dominating the top placings. It is the combination of natural fit and traditional craft that produces such consistent excellence.

Yame vs Uji gyokuro

Both regions produce world-class gyokuro, with subtle distinctions. Yame gyokuro tends to a very pronounced umami concentration, a thick, almost broth-like body, floral aromatic top notes and a long sweet finish, often slightly more refined and delicate than the Uji equivalent. Uji gyokuro tends to a deep umami with a firm body and a cleaner, more direct, slightly more powerful character. In Japanese national competitions, Yame gyokuro (especially from Hoshino-mura) regularly takes the top placings, with Uji competitive but often just behind. Premium Yame typically prices around 10 to 20% below comparable Uji, because its international recognition lags, while Uji retains the stronger global brand through its centuries of tea-ceremony association. Both are world-class; serious enthusiasts should try both to find their own preference.

Taste, and the Yame-cha designation

Quality Yame gyokuro pours a pale yellow-green to vivid green, bright and clear. The aroma carries marine, seaweed (kaiso) undertones with floral sweetness and a subtle vegetal freshness, and the taste is an intense umami concentration unlike anything else in tea: a thick, almost broth like and creamy mouthfeel, sweet seaweed and dashi notes, minimal astringency when brewed correctly, and a sweet "amami" aftertaste that lingers for minutes. On labelling, the "Yame-cha" designation requires tea grown in the Yame area and is less geographically loose than some regional names, while a Hoshino-mura attribution points to the finest tier. Even within the designation, individual producers vary, so the harvest year and the producer name still matter. High-grade Yame gyokuro is one of tea's most concentrated single-cup experiences.

How to brew gyokuro

Gyokuro brewing differs sharply from other teas, and doing it right rewards the leaf cost. The single biggest point is temperature: use water at 50 to 60C, much cooler than other green tea, since the common mistake is brewing it far too hot. Use a relatively high leaf ratio, around 5g to 50 to 80ml of water, because the small portions are intentional. Steep the first infusion for two to three minutes, with subsequent steeps shorter, giving three or four productive infusions as the flavour evolves. A small Japanese kyusu is ideal, and metal vessels are best avoided as they can affect the delicate flavour. Pour gently, sip slowly, and treat the small serving as something to savour. The spent leaves are sometimes even eaten with a little ponzu as a delicacy.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

For the cupboard, see the English tea range and loose leaf range.

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