Kill Green: The Heat Step That Fixes Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Kill green, in summary:** The heat step that deactivates the leaf's enzymes and halts oxidation. Its timing, and whether the leaf is pan-fired or steamed, is what defines green tea.

Kill green is the decisive heat step that stops the leaf changing. This sits in the processing cluster beside tea oxidation explained.

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

What kill-green is

Kill green is the application of heat, by pan-firing or steaming, to deactivate the leaf's natural enzymes and halt oxidation. It is called sha qing in Chinese, and it is the pivotal move in the oxidation story. It matters because it is the step that keeps green tea green: fix the leaf early and oxidation is essentially prevented, so the cup stays fresh, vivid and vegetal rather than turning amber and malty, which is exactly why green tea tastes the way it does. One important distinction: fixing is not the same as drying. Kill-green halts the enzymes, while the later firing or drying step removes the remaining moisture for shelf stability, two separate heat steps doing two different jobs. See tea processing steps for the full sequence.

Aspect	Pan-fired	Steamed
Tradition	Chinese greens	Japanese greens
Character	Nutty, toasty	Vivid, marine, vegetal
Job of the step	Deactivate enzymes, halt oxidation	Same, by steam
Not the same as	Drying (removes moisture, separate step)	Drying
Failure modes	Too little = grassy faults; too much = scorched	Same

Pan-fired vs steamed

The method of fixing is itself a defining fork. Chinese greens are often pan-fired, which adds a nutty, toasty character, while Japanese greens are usually steamed, which preserves a vivid, marine, vegetal profile. That single choice is much of why a Chinese green and a Japanese one taste so different even before any other variable, and it is the distinction the Japanese tea overview builds on.

Timing defines the type

The useful idea is that this one heat step is a lever, and where it falls on the timeline produces an entire category. Fix the leaf early, before oxidation, and you have green; let it oxidise partially and then fix it, and you have oolong; let it oxidise fully with no early fix at all, and you have black. Nothing about the plant changed, only when and how heat was applied, which is the cleanest demonstration that processing, not species, is the real author of tea. Hold that and the confusing shelf becomes a readable system rather than a list to memorise.

Skill, and what it tells you

Kill-green is skill-dependent in a way a drinker can taste. Too little heat, or too slow a fix, leaves grassy, raw, enzymatic faults in the cup; too much scorches and flattens it; and even, precise heat control across a whole batch is real craft rather than a switch. That is why two green teas from the same garden can differ markedly, and it gives you real diagnostic power: a grassy, raw edge usually means the fix was too light, a scorched flatness means it was too hard, and a clean, vivid greenness means it was judged well. So you can taste the craft rather than guess at it, which is the read-the-cup discipline the how to judge tea quality guide trains.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health
- PubMed: Polyphenols and chronic disease prevention

The relevant aisle: the English tea range and loose leaf range.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · If a pan fired or steamed green here appeals, try it once. One cup shows the kill green step better than twenty articles.

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