# Matcha Grades: Mostly Marketing

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Matcha grading, in summary:** "Ceremonial" and "culinary" are unregulated marketing terms, useful only as rough guidance. Judge colour, texture, aroma and taste, not the printed word.

Matcha "grades" are among the most marketing-driven labels in tea. This sits in the grading cluster beside tea leaf grades.

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

## There's no official standard

The blunt starting point is that there is no official, regulated global matcha grading standard, so "ceremonial" and "culinary" are largely seller terms any producer can print. That does not make them useless: they broadly imply something real, with "ceremonial" pointing at a smoother, sweeter matcha for drinking straight and "culinary" at a stronger, more bitter one for lattes and baking. But they are a rough guide, not a guarantee, which is why "ceremonial grade" on a cheap tin proves nothing on its own. See ceremonial vs culinary and what is matcha.

| Signal | What it tells you |
|---|---|
| Vivid jade green | Likely fresh, higher grade (best quick tell) |
| Dull/yellow/khaki | Lower grade or stale |
| Fine talc texture | Well-processed, slow stone-ground |
| Fresh sweet aroma | Quality and freshness |
| "Ceremonial" on a cheap tin | An unregulated word, not a guarantee |
| Match grade to use | Drinking vs latte/baking |

## What actually signals quality

Since the words are unregulated, it is worth being concrete about where real quality lives: four things you can check. Colour: top matcha is a vivid, almost electric jade, and any drift toward yellow, olive or khaki signals later leaf, more stem, or oxidation from poor storage, which makes it the most reliable quick tell. Texture: it should feel like talc between the fingers rather than gritty, which reflects slow stone-grinding rather than fast machine milling. Aroma: fresh, sweet and vegetal, not hay-like or flat, which is the quickest

staleness tell. Taste: real drinking-grade matcha is smooth, with natural sweetness and umami and only mild bitterness, whereas harsh, sharply grassy bitterness drunk straight usually means a culinary grade used wrongly rather than a bad tea. Those four, plus a candid seller stating origin and harvest, are the real signal. See how to judge tea quality.

### What actually moves quality

It also helps to know what actually moves quality, so the marketing words have something to be checked against. Leaf age and harvest matter most (younger, first or spring shaded leaf is finer), along with how thoroughly stem and vein are removed and how slowly the leaf is stone-ground. All of those matter far more than whether a tin says "ceremonial". A grade word is, at best, a compressed shorthand for where a tea sits on that real spectrum, and at worst just a sticker.

### The buyer's habit, and why it matters most for matcha

The single habit to keep is to invert the order of trust: let the printed grade be the last thing you weigh, not the first. Start from origin and harvest detail, then the colour and texture in the tin, then the aroma, then the cup itself, and only then read what the marketing called it, by which point the word can no longer mislead you because you have already judged the tea. This matters more for matcha than almost anywhere else in tea: with leaf tea you can often see and smell what you are buying, and the price band roughly tracks quality, but with matcha the powder is sealed, the words are unregulated, the quality range is enormous and the price spread is huge, so the label does more unearned work and the buyer is more exposed to paying ceremonial money for culinary leaf. Get the habit right here and it transfers cleanly to every other "grade" claim in tea.

### Reference noted


- PubMed: Matcha green tea and human health


**FROM THE CURATOR**

*teas* · Start with the simplest matcha grade here that fits your routine. Whisks, bowls and the other grades can wait for week two.

### Matcha reading

- Matcha grades explained
- Ceremonial vs culinary
- Matcha
- How to judge tea quality
- How to make matcha
- Tea adulteration

### More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
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- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
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