Resteeping Tea: Many Cups From One Measure

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Re-steeping tea, in summary:** Whole-leaf premium teas re-steep across 5-12 successive cups, each revealing different notes. Broken and bagged teas give one. One of the most rewarding shifts a UK drinker can make.

"Can you re-use tea leaves?" has a leaf-dependent answer. This sits in the brewing cluster beside western vs gongfu.

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

The answer

Good whole-leaf tea, oolong, pu-erh and many greens, gives multiple worthwhile infusions, while broken bag tea usually gives one. The reason is that intact leaf releases its compounds gradually, so successive steeps reveal different facets rather than just weaker tea, whereas a broken or CTC leaf has nothing held in reserve and a second bag steep is weak and pointless. Later steeps generally need slightly longer to compensate as the leaf gives less, and how many you get is style-dependent: some oolongs and pu-erh go many rounds. One caveat: re-steep within the same session and do not leave wet leaf sitting around for hours, especially warm. See whole leaf vs broken.

Aspect	Note
Whole-leaf	5-12 re-steeps with named-cultivar premium leaf
Broken-leaf	1-2 re-steeps maximum; flavour depletes fast
Tea bags	Designed for single steep; weak second cup
Best categories	Oolong, pu-erh, gao shan, dan cong, dragon well
Mid-cup categories	Premium black (Darjeeling, Yunnan), sencha, white
Poor candidates	CTC black, ground green, broken-leaf supermarket tea
Steep adjustment	Each successive steep slightly longer than the last
Buying signal	Whole-leaf, named cultivar, named producer

The gongfu method that unlocks it

Standard western brewing (one large mug, a 3 to 4 minute steep, then bin the leaf) actively prevents successful re-steeps, because it depletes the leaf in one go. The gongfu method makes multi-steep brewing work. Use a small 100 to 150ml gaiwan or teapot rather than a mug, so the vessel concentrates flavour and allows a much higher leaf-to-water ratio, around 5 to 7g per 100ml. Use water just off the boil (about 95C, or a cooler 80 to 85C for green and white), and keep the steeps very short, 10 to 15 seconds for the first, then gradually building (15s, 20s, 30s, 45s) as the leaf unfurls and gives up successive layers. Without it the multi-steep claim is theoretical; with it, multi-steep is the default. See gongfu cha.

What changes across the steeps

"Layered character" undersells what actually happens. The first steep reveals the most volatile aromatics: the floral, bright top notes. The second and third reveal the mid-palate: the creamy body, the fruit, the mouthfeel. The fourth to sixth bring the deeper base: a sweet minerality, the lingering finish, the structural character of the cultivar. The seventh through twelfth are gentle, sweet and mellow, the aromatics spent but the body remaining. Across eight or more steeps you have effectively had a multi-cup tasting menu from a single 5 to 7g brewing session, watching the cultivar reveal itself at each layer of extraction. See oolong tea for a good place to try it.

Cost per cup

The headline price per 100g of premium leaf looks alarming next to £3 to £5 supermarket tea, but the arithmetic is different. A high-quality gao shan oolong at £40 per 100g, brewed at 6g in a gaiwan for eight to ten successive 100ml steeps, is one £2.40 session delivering eight to ten cups, around £0.24 to £0.30 a cup. A £3-per-100g builder's bag is cheaper per cup (roughly £0.07), but it delivers a one-note functional cup, while the premium one delivers a successively varying, named-cultivar experience with real aromatic layers. Compare cost per session, not cost per gram, and premium tea that steeps again and again is real value. See how to judge tea quality.

Common mistakes

Most failed re-steeps trace to a small set of errors. Using a too-large vessel (a 400ml mug with 6g of leaf gives a dilute first cup and tasteless later ones, so the small vessel is functional, not aesthetic); using broken-leaf or CTC tea, which is too damaged to release flavour in controlled layers; using a too-long first steep, which depletes the leaf at once when 10 to 15 seconds is right; using too-hot water on delicate white or green, which over-extracts and adds astringency; discarding the leaf too early, since most UK attempts stop at two or three steeps when good gao shan and aged sheng commonly give eight to twelve; and skipping the rinse, when a brief 5 to 10 second rinse wakes a compressed aged pu-erh before the first proper steep. Get both the leaf and the method right and the premium experience follows.

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teas · Buy leaf that steeps well on the cup, not on the label. The wider shelf can follow once

you know which leaf steeps best for you.

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