Blind Tea Tasting: Judge the Tea, Not the Label

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Blind tea tasting, in summary:** Hide the label, price and packaging so you judge the tea, not the marketing. The single fairest test there is, and the cheapest to run at home.

Blind tasting is the single best antidote to tea marketing. This sits in the brewing cluster beside tea cupping.

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

What it is, and why it works

Blind tasting means tasting teas without knowing their brand, price or origin, so your judgement is not steered by expectation. Perception is heavily influenced by everything around the cup: a high price really does raise expected quality before the first sip, smart packaging and a heritage story carry that expectation into the cup, and a familiar name quietly fills in flavours you have not actually tasted yet. None of that is a failure of intelligence, it is simply how perception works, which is exactly why the trade removes the cues by force rather than relying on willpower. Take them away and the only thing left to judge is the tea, which is uncomfortable precisely because it works: expensive names are routinely humbled by cheaper ones, and a good deal of what felt like quality turns out to have been the story on the box. See how to judge tea quality.

Running a fair one at home

The method is simple and the discipline is everything. Have someone else brew every tea to identical parameters, the same leaf-to-water ratio, time, water and temperature, in identical cups that are coded rather than labelled. If the brewing varies, you are tasting the brewing, not the tea. Taste, write notes on body, brightness, briskness and the length and sweetness of the finish, commit to a ranking, and only then reveal which tea was which. The order is the point: decide first, learn the identities second.

Variable	Hold constant	Why it matters
Leaf to water ratio	same weight per same volume	more leaf reads as a "better", stronger tea
Steep time	identical for every cup	a longer steep fakes body and strength
Water temperature	same off boil point	hotter water flatters sturdy teas and scalds delicate ones
Water itself	one source for all	mineral content alone shifts the cup
Vessel and pour	identical coded cups	shape, colour and labels prime the verdict

Blind tasting vs cupping

The two attack the same bias from different directions. Cupping standardises the brew so aggressively that any difference you perceive must be the tea, with a deliberately long over-steep that exposes faults under fair conditions. Blind tasting hides the identity so your verdict cannot be primed by price or brand, and a blind line-up can be brewed to drink normally rather than harshly. Used together they are the most reliable way to find out if a more expensive tea is really better for you, or merely better presented.

What it teaches you to buy

Done a few times, blind tasting tells you three useful things: your real preferences rather than your aspirational ones, the actual cash value of a premium once the label is gone, and how little a famous name guarantees on its own. The least comfortable result is how often a cheaper, plainer tea holds its own, or wins, against a celebrated name, though plenty of expensive teas do earn their place blind too. It does not prove premium tea is a con; it proves the narrower, more useful point that the name is never the evidence. So spend accordingly: everyday money on the brisk daily cup, finer money only on the teas that actually win blind, and check the per-cup price rather than the prestige. Try it against your own shelf and the full tea shop .

Want to buy a good one?

Run your own blind test against the full tea shop or the loose leaf range. Let the cup do the judging, work out the cost per cup instead of trusting the marketing, and remember that free UK delivery starts over £35.

Browse the tea range

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teas · Believe your own palate before the label on the shelf. Curiosity is the only reliable guide.

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