Gyokuro

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Gyokuro, in summary:** Gyokuro is Japan's shaded luxury green: weeks under shade build intense umami and low astringency. Brew strikingly cool (50-60°C) or you ruin it.

Gyokuro is one of Japan's most prized teas, and the most demanding to brew. This is one of the named tea pages, near sencha.

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

What it is

A high-grade Japanese green tea shaded for roughly three weeks before harvest, then steamed. The shading drives the flavour: cut sunlight causes the plant to accumulate amino acids (mainly theanine) instead of converting them, and to produce fewer of the catechins that cause astringency. The result is an intensely umami, sweet, low-bitterness cup unlike any everyday green.

Why shading defines it

The shading is not incidental; it is the entire source of gyokuro's character. More theanine means deeper, sweeter umami. Fewer catechins means very little astringency. The cup produced is closer to a light broth or dashi than to ordinary tea: thick, jade-green, savoury-sweet, lingering. This is also why high-grade matcha shares the same umami note; both use weeks of pre-harvest shading.

How to brew it

Strikingly cool water, around 50-60°C, is non-negotiable. Use a generous quantity of leaf to a small volume of water (roughly 5g per 60-80ml), and steep for about 90 seconds. Hot water scalds away the delicate amino acids and pulls the small residual harshness, wasting the price paid. This is the fussiest mainstream tea to brew correctly; get the temperature wrong and even real gyokuro tastes thin and bitter.

Regions and what to expect

Uji (near Kyoto) and Yame (Fukuoka) are the benchmark gyokuro regions. A well-brewed cup from good leaf is unmistakable: deep jade-green, thick, intensely savoury-sweet with low astringency and a long finish. A thin, grassy, astringent cup either means the wrong temperature or a leaf that borrowed the name without the substance.

The caveat

"Gyokuro" is a grade and style, not a tightly policed legal guarantee everywhere. Cheaper gyokuro can be a lightly shaded or lower-grade green. The reliable test is the cup: real gyokuro brewed correctly is unmistakably umami-rich and sweet; a grassy, astringent cup is the name without the substance. Buy from a source that can speak specifically about origin and grade.

Gyokuro at a glance

Aspect	The read
What it is	Japan's shaded luxury green; weeks under shade before harvest
Why shading	Builds amino acids: intense umami, very low astringency
Brew temperature	50-60°C; strikingly cool, not optional
Brew ratio	Generous leaf (~5g per 60-80ml), small volume, short steep
Caveat	Name borrowed loosely; grade and brew decide the cup
Who it suits	Someone who wants to sip slowly and values umami over briskness

Common questions

Why is gyokuro so expensive? Shading takes a lot of labour and reduces yield; the price reflects real production cost, not just marketing.

Why does my gyokuro taste bitter? The water was too hot. Even 70°C is too warm; gyokuro wants 50-60°C. A bitter gyokuro is almost always a brewing failure, not a leaf quality problem.

Is gyokuro worth the premium? Yes, for someone who values umami and sweetness over briskness, brews attentively with cool water, and wants to taste what Japanese shading technique produces. Not worth it for someone who brews quickly with hot water; the cup will disappoint regardless of leaf quality.

How does it compare to matcha? Both are shaded; gyokuro is infused and poured off the leaf while matcha is powdered and whisked in. Gyokuro has lower caffeine per cup; matcha is more intense and you consume the whole leaf.

Quick take

Gyokuro is the most demanding brew in Japanese tea and the most distinctive cup it produces: shaded, umami-rich, sweet, almost broth-like. It rewards patience and a thermometer. Get the temperature right (50-60°C) and buy from a credible source that names origin and grade; judge it on the cup. Explore the green tea range or the full tea shop.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

FROM THE CURATOR

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