Silver Needle Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Silver Needle, in summary:** Silver Needle wants 75 to 85°C water, 3 to 5g per 150ml and a 2 to 3 minute steep; it can be aged, and 3 to 5+ years of storage turns it towards honey and herbal depth.

Silver Needle is the most prestigious white tea; here is the short version. Other named teas to read beside it include Keemun.

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

What it is

Bai Hao Yin Zhen: a white tea made only from plump, downy buds, classically from Fujian Da Bai cultivars. Minimal processing (wither and dry only) preserves the bud's natural character: delicate, subtly sweet, softly hay-like. Real tea, not a herbal; see white tea.

How to brew it

75-85°C water (cooler than green tea, hotter than gyokuro); 3-5g of buds per 150ml; steep 2-3 minutes covered. The dense bud structure needs longer extraction than leaf teas. A glass vessel lets you watch the "needles dancing" phenomenon as the silvery buds hydrate and rise; this visual element is considered part of the Silver Needle experience. Re-steep 4-6 times; the second infusion is often the sweetest.

Ageing

Silver Needle really can be aged. Fresh (0-1 year): bright, delicately floral, honey-light. 3-year aged: apricot and honey-vanilla notes develop. 5-7 year: deep, mellow, dried-fruit and beeswax character. 10+ years: contemplative, deep and herbal. Storage: airtight, dry, dark, room temperature. Ageing is a real traditional category, not marketing; the character shift is pronounced and deliberate.

What to expect

Subtle, soft, delicately sweet; a tea of nuance rather than power. The interest is finesse, not intensity. High theanine relative to caffeine (bud chemistry) gives a gently alert quality without a strong caffeine hit; modest caffeine (15-25mg per cup) makes it suitable for late afternoon or evening.

The caveat

"Silver Needle" from the wrong cultivar or careless processing is not the same. Real Fujian Da Bai cultivar and careful withering are necessary. The name is sometimes borrowed; judge the leaf (plump, consistently downy, silver-white) and the cup (delicately sweet, no harshness) rather than the label alone.

The essentials: Silver Needle brewing and ageing

Aspect	Note
Brewing water	75-85°C; cooler than green tea, hotter than gyokuro
Vessel	Glass gaiwan or porcelain, 150-200ml; glass for visible-leaf appreciation
Leaf load	3-5g per 150ml; generous due to bud density
Steep time	2-3 minutes first; longer than typical due to bud-only structure
Re-steeps	4-6 productive cups from one leaf batch
Fresh vs aged	Fresh is bright and floral; aged 3 to 5+ years it turns deeper, honeyed and herbal
Storage	Sealed, dry, dark; age-friendly if kept well
Caffeine	Modest (~15-25mg per cup); suitable late afternoon or evening

Common questions

Why are the buds silvery? The fine white hairs (trichomes) on the young buds give Silver Needle its silver appearance; they are characteristic of the Da Bai cultivar and a quality signal.

Can I age Silver Needle at home? Yes. Store it airtight in a tin, dry and dark at room temperature; it will evolve meaningfully over 3-7 years. Check it annually; the character shifts noticeably each year.

How does it compare to White Peony (Bai Mu Dan)? White Peony uses buds plus young leaves; it is fuller-bodied and less delicate than Silver Needle, at a lower price. Both are Fujian white teas; Silver Needle is the more refined, White Peony the more accessible everyday white.

Does Silver Needle have caffeine? Yes, modestly (around 15-25mg per cup), lower than typical green tea. High theanine relative to caffeine makes it gentle in effect; suitable in the evening for most people.

Quick take

Silver Needle is the benchmark white tea: buds only, minimally processed, delicate and sweet, and good for ageing if stored properly. Brew in glass at 75-85°C to get the full visual and flavour experience; re-steep generously. Buy from a source that names the cultivar and origin. Explore the white tea range or the full tea shop.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

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