Keemun Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Keemun, in summary:** Keemun is a refined Anhui black, wine-cocoa-floral, a classic English Breakfast component, but the name spans a wide grade range, so judge the cup, pay for grade.

Keemun is one of China's most celebrated black teas; here is the short version. Its neighbour in the named tea pages is Lapsang Souchong.

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

What it is

A black tea from Qimen (Keemun) in Anhui, China, known for refinement rather than brute strength; see black tea.

Why it tastes distinctive

Careful processing gives a characteristic wine-like, cocoa, gently floral profile: the "Keemun aroma". The same attention to oxidation that sets it apart from everyday black teas also makes it more delicate; see oxidation.

Its blend role

Keemun is a classic component of traditional English Breakfast-style blends; familiar even to those who do not know the name. See English Breakfast.

How to brew it

Boiling water, moderate three-to-four-minute steep. Refined enough to drink neat to catch the cocoa and ripe-fruit notes; takes a splash of milk without falling apart. Under-brew it and the complexity never arrives; stew it and the refinement is lost.

Grades

Quality ranges widely: from everyday blend grade to refined Hao Ya. The name is a useful hint, never a guarantee. Paying for grade rather than for the word is the whole skill.

The caveat

A cheap Keemun in a commodity blend does come from Keemun, but at the modest end of the range. To taste why it is called the burgundy of teas you need a single-origin Mao Feng or Hao Ya grade, brewed carefully and drunk neat first. Judge the cup; see how to judge quality.

Keemun grade ladder

Grade	What to expect
Standard / blend grade	The everyday end; the Chinese note in many breakfast blends
Gongfu	Traditional longer twisted leaf, solid single-origin
Mao Feng	Refined, gold-tipped, the value sweet spot
Hao Ya A / B	Super-premium, extensive gold tips, special occasion

Common questions

What makes Keemun different from Assam or Darjeeling? Keemun is softer and more complex: wine-cocoa-floral rather than malty-brisk (Assam) or muscatel-delicate (Darjeeling). It is the Chinese approach to black tea, with refinement as the goal rather than strength.

Is it good without milk? Yes, and the first cup is best drunk neat to catch the cocoa and ripe-fruit notes. It can take milk, but milk masks the character that makes it worth the premium.

How do I know if I have good Keemun? Brewed correctly (freshly boiled, 3-4 minutes), it should be smooth, subtly sweet, wine-like and cocoa-edged with no harshness. A thin, bitter cup is usually a grade or brewing issue, not a Keemun issue.

Quick take

Keemun is the most refined Chinese black: wine-cocoa-floral, historically the Chinese component of English Breakfast, and worth the effort. The name spans commodity blend to premium single-origin, so buy on grade, brew with care, and judge the cup rather than the label. Mao Feng is the value sweet spot. Explore the black tea range or the full tea shop.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · The name tells you what it is aiming at; the cup tells you whether it arrived. Buy on grade, not on the word.

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