Jasmine Tea Explained: Scenting, Quality and Brewing

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Jasmine tea, in summary:** Jasmine tea is a green or white base scented with jasmine blossom. How real layered scenting differs from cheap sprayed flavouring, and how to brew it.

Jasmine tea is one of the most recognisable scented teas in the world, and also one of the most variable in quality. The name covers everything from a cheap, perfumed teabag to a loose leaf tea scented by hand with great care, and the gap between them is enormous. This page explains what jasmine tea actually is, how it is made, and how to tell a good one from a sprayed on imitation.

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

What it is

Jasmine tea is, at its core, a base tea (almost always green, sometimes white or lightly oxidised) that has been scented with jasmine blossom. The tea itself is the same *Camellia sinensis* as any other; what makes it jasmine tea is the scenting process, not a different plant. Good jasmine tea is therefore really a question of two things: the quality of the base tea, and how the jasmine aroma was put into it.

How real jasmine scenting works

Traditional jasmine tea is scented by layering the finished tea with fresh jasmine flowers, which open and release their aroma at night. The tea, which readily absorbs surrounding smells, takes up the fragrance over hours, and the spent flowers are removed. The finest grades repeat this process over several nights with fresh blossom each time, building a deep, natural fragrance without the flowers necessarily remaining in the final tea. This is slow, labour intensive and is the reason good jasmine tea is not cheap.

How cheap jasmine tea is made

At the other end, inexpensive jasmine tea is often a low grade base sprayed with jasmine flavouring or scented quickly and crudely, sometimes with dried petals added for appearance rather than aroma. It can smell intensely of jasmine in the packet and taste thin, soapy or perfumed in the cup. The presence of visible flowers is not a quality signal; in traditionally scented tea the petals are often sieved out, while in cheap tea they are added for show.

Sign	Better jasmine tea	Poorer jasmine tea
Base tea	Good quality green or white	Low grade, dusty
Scenting	Layered with fresh blossom, repeated	Sprayed flavouring
Aroma	Natural, soft, lingering	Sharp, soapy, perfumed
Petals	Often sieved out	Added for appearance

Jasmine pearls and grades

One premium form is the jasmine pearl, where young tea leaves are hand rolled into small pearls and then scented; they unfurl as they brew and give a particularly clean, fragrant cup. Pearls are a good example of the general rule that with jasmine tea you are paying for leaf quality and scenting labour, not for how strongly it smells through the bag.

How it tastes

A good jasmine green is soft, floral and slightly sweet, with the fresh, grassy character of the green tea underneath still present rather than buried. The jasmine should read as a natural perfume that lifts the tea, not as a heavy, sweet, soapy top note that masks a poor base. Balance is the mark of quality: you should be able to taste the tea and the flower together.

How to brew it

Because the base is usually green, jasmine tea wants the same care as any green tea: water well off the boil, around 75 to 85C, and a short steep of two to three minutes. Boiling water and long steeping scald the delicate green base and turn the jasmine harsh and bitter, which is the single most common reason a decent jasmine tea disappoints at home. It can usually be re steeped, as covered on the re steeping page, with the second infusion often softer and very pleasant.

A little history

Jasmine scenting is an old Chinese craft, traditionally associated with Fujian province, developed over centuries as a way of marrying the absorbent quality of tea leaf with the night opening fragrance of jasmine blossom. It is one of the oldest scented teas and remains the benchmark for the technique. That long tradition is part of why the best jasmine teas are still made the slow, layered way described above, and why the term carries an expectation of craft that the cheapest sprayed versions quietly trade on without honouring.

Jasmine green, white and pearl

The base under the jasmine matters as much as the scenting. A jasmine green is the classic: fresh and grassy lifted by floral perfume. A jasmine white or jasmine silver needle uses a more delicate, sweeter base for a softer, richer cup. Jasmine pearls, hand rolled and then scented, are prized for a particularly clean fragrance and the pleasure of watching them unfurl. None is inherently best; they are different balances of briskness, delicacy and price, and knowing which base you are buying tells you what kind of cup to expect.

Why temperature is the whole game

More jasmine tea is ruined by a kettle than by anything else. The green or white base is delicate, and water at a rolling boil scalds it, turning the tea bitter and pushing the jasmine into a harsh, soapy register. Water well off the boil keeps the base sweet and lets the jasmine read as a soft perfume rather than a chemical note. If a good jasmine tea has ever tasted unpleasant to you, the cause is almost always heat and time, not the tea, and it is the easiest fault in tea to fix.

When to drink it

Jasmine tea suits the afternoon and early evening particularly well: it is fragrant enough to feel like a small occasion, light enough not to sit heavily, and it pairs beautifully with delicate food such as steamed dumplings, light fish, plain biscuits or fruit. It is also lovely cold brewed, where the slow cold extraction keeps the floral note clean and gentle, a route covered on the cold brew page.

Buying it well

A few signals separate a good jasmine tea from a perfumed disappointment. A stated green or white base and some indication of grade is a better sign than a generic "jasmine tea". A natural, soft aroma in the dry leaf that is pleasant rather than sharp suggests real scenting. A sensible price matters too: real layered scenting with fresh blossom over several nights is labour, and a very cheap jasmine tea has almost certainly been sprayed. Visible petals, by contrast, tell you nothing, since the best traditional teas often have them sieved out.

Jasmine tea and food

Part of jasmine tea’s enduring popularity is how well it sits with food. Its soft floral character is a classic match for Chinese food, dim sum and steamed dumplings in particular, and it works well with light, delicate dishes, plain biscuits, steamed fish and fresh fruit where a sturdy black would overwhelm. As an afternoon or post meal cup it feels like a small occasion without being heavy, which is much of the reason it has travelled so far beyond its origins.

Storing jasmine tea

Jasmine tea keeps its delicate fragrance only if it is stored well. Like all scented and green teas it should be kept airtight, cool, dark and well away from strong smelling foods, because the same absorbency that lets it take up jasmine also lets it take up the smell of a spice cupboard or a coffee tin. Bought fresh and stored properly it holds its perfume for many months; left open or near strong odours it fades and muddies quickly, which is a common and avoidable reason a good jasmine tea stops tasting like one.

A gentle everyday luxury

Part of the appeal of jasmine tea is that it feels special without being expensive or difficult. A good green jasmine is inexpensive next to many speciality teas, brews in minutes, and turns an ordinary afternoon into something slightly ceremonial through scent alone. For many people it is the tea that first showed them tea could be fragrant and pleasurable rather than merely functional, which is a large part of why it remains one

of the most popular scented teas in the world.

Common questions

Is jasmine tea caffeinated? Usually yes, because the base is normally green tea, so it carries green tea levels of caffeine.

Are the flowers meant to be in it? Not necessarily. In traditionally scented tea the blossom is often removed; visible petals are not a quality marker.

Why does mine taste soapy? Usually a sprayed, low grade tea, or a good one brewed too hot and too long.

Is jasmine tea a herbal tea? No. It is real tea scented with jasmine, not a caffeine free flower infusion.

If you would like a properly scented example rather than a perfumed teabag, it is worth browsing the jasmine teas we stock and choosing a good green based one, then brewing it gently as described above to taste the balance this page describes.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

Practical shopping line for this topic: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. The rest of the tea shop is shelved here, and UK shipping is free above £35.

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