Dan Cong: Phoenix Mountain's Aromatic Oolong

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Dan Cong, in summary:** Dan Cong is the Phoenix Mountain oolong family, prized for fruit and flower aromas that come from cultivar and craft, not flavouring. "Single bush" is mostly a style name now; brew it short and hot, gongfu style, to get the best from it.

Phoenix Dan Cong is the oolong famous for tasting uncannily of fruit and flowers, almond, orchid, honey, lychee, magnolia, with nothing added, and it is also a tea whose name is widely misunderstood, which is where a good guide earns its place. "Dan Cong" literally means "single bush", and the romantic implication is that every one comes from a single ancient tree. In practice the term now mostly denotes a style and a group of aroma-type cultivars from the Phoenix (Fenghuang) mountains of Guangdong. True single-tree Dan Cong exists, but it is rare and expensive; most Dan Cong you buy is a named aroma type grown from many bushes. Saying that clearly is the difference between an informed buyer and a romanced one.

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What Dan Cong actually is

It is a Guangdong oolong, usually fairly oxidised and often roasted, from the Phoenix mountains, made from cultivars selected and named for the natural aroma they recall. The fruit and flower likeness is real and is the whole point of the tea, produced by cultivar, terroir and skilled processing rather than by scenting. The aroma name describes the target flavour, not an additive, and the best examples are among the most astonishing things to smell and taste in all of tea.

The famous aroma cultivars

The named-aroma system is the heart of Dan Cong, and learning a few names turns random sampling into targeted exploration. Mi Lan Xiang (honey orchid) is the most widely available and the natural starting point, rich and honeyed with gentle sweetness across many steeps. Ya Shi Xiang (literally "duck shit fragrance", a deliberately humble name said to have discouraged thieves from the original mother trees centuries ago) is, despite the name, one of the most beautiful, full of almond blossom and lychee. Zhi Lan Xiang (gardenia) is sharper and brighter; Xing Ren Xiang (almond) really does smell of almond; and Gui Hua Xiang (osmanthus), Huang Zhi Xiang and Da Wu Ye round out what the UK speciality market usually carries. Each one tastes clearly different side by side, which is what makes drinking across a few cultivars such a rewarding small project.

Single bush, or single cultivar?

Because "single bush" sounds exclusive, it is used to inflate prices, so getting the framing right matters. In the oldest Phoenix practice the words meant exactly what they say: one ancient bush of unique genetics, harvested on its own for a tiny annual crop. A handful of those original mother trees, some recorded at over 600 and even 700 years old, still produce real single bush tea that sells for extraordinary money, often £200 to £500 and up per 50g when it appears at all.

The vast majority of modern Dan Cong, though, is grown from cuttings of those named mother trees, planted in larger gardens and harvested at scale. The cultivar genetics carry through the cuttings, so the cup is true Dan Cong character; it is simply not literally single-bush. A good seller will say "Mi Lan Xiang cultivar" or "Dan Cong cultivar tea" rather than "single bush", and will price any real mother-tree tea separately. The sensible read: cultivar-true Dan Cong from cuttings is the right entry buy at around £15 to £40 per 50g, while literal mother-tree tea is a special-occasion purchase at £100 and up. The same know-the-tier habit runs through the how to judge tea quality guide; judge the aroma, clarity and finish in the cup, and treat "single bush" as a style word unless a reputable seller credibly documents one old tree.

Brewing without bitterness

Dan Cong is famously easy to over-brew into harshness, which is the single most common reason an expensive one disappoints. Brew it gongfu: about 5 to 6g of leaf in a 100ml gaiwan, near-boiling water at 95 to 100C, and a very short first steep of 8 to 12 seconds, lengthening cautiously across five to eight rounds (15s, 25s, 40s and on). Each cup reveals a different layer of the cultivar's aroma, and a good session is twenty to forty minutes of attentive drinking. Warm the gaiwan first so it does not steal heat from the leaf, keep the water hot (Dan Cong wants near-boiling, not the cooler temperatures sencha likes), and resist long steeps; anything much over thirty seconds early on turns the cup astringent and buries the very aroma you paid for. Western single-steep brewing works but loses the layering, so if there is one oolong worth owning a small gaiwan for, it is this one, the same buy-the-tool-for-the-cup point the how to make tea guide makes.

Dan Cong at a glance

Aspect	Note
Region	Phoenix Mountains, Chaozhou, Guangdong, China
Name meaning	"Single bush", traditionally one tree, one harvest
Oxidation	Varied, typically 30 to 60% across the family
Cultivars / aromas	Mi Lan Xiang (honey orchid), Ya Shi Xiang, Zhi Lan Xiang (gardenia), and many more
Famous trees	Old single bushes 100+ years old, some over 700
Cup character	Single-cultivar fruit and flower notes, vividly aromatic
Brewing	Gongfu in a small gaiwan; Western works but loses nuance
"Single bush" today	Mostly propagated cuttings, not from one tree

Being a real oolong, it offers the ordinary tea package: caffeine and polyphenols, nothing dramatic, and no special powers from the aromatics. The fruit and flower character is about taste and smell, not medicine, so treat any claim beyond that as marketing on top of an extraordinary tasting tea; the aroma alone is reason enough. The companion oolong tea, Tieguanyin and oolong oxidation guides cover the rest of the family,

and you can source Dan Cong from the brand directory or the full tea shop.

If this piece pointed you somewhere, these are the obvious places to land: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. For more, the full tea shop ships free across the UK over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · With Dan Cong, two or three good pouches take an order past £35, and UK delivery is then free. Build a small Dan Cong order rather than one big splurge.

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