Liu Bao Tea: The Dark Tea That Is Not Pu-erh

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Liu Bao, in summary:** Liu Bao is a distinctive Guangxi dark tea, not a pu erh: smooth, sweetly woody and forgiving to brew, with after meal folklore that is belief rather than proven fact.

Liu Bao is one of the great under-known dark teas, and the most useful starting point is that it is not pu-erh, even though it is constantly shelved next to it and tastes superficially similar. Liu Bao is a hei cha (dark, post-fermented tea) from Guangxi province, with its own history, processing and character, and treating it as "a kind of pu-erh" both misnames it and misses what makes it distinct.

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

What Liu Bao actually is

Liu Bao is made from local Guangxi leaf, processed and then post-fermented and aged, traditionally including a spell in baskets, to give a smooth, dark, mellow tea. Like shou pu-erh it is fermented and ready to drink without decades of waiting, and it shares the deep, earthy, woody family resemblance of dark teas. Its classic signature, often described as a "betel nut" (binglang) note, is a particular sweet, woody, slightly aromatic character that enthusiasts prize and that sets a good aged Liu Bao apart from generic dark tea.

How it differs from pu-erh

The distinctions matter for buyers. Liu Bao is from Guangxi, not Yunnan; it is its own category (hei cha) rather than a pu-erh sub-type; and its fermentation and basket-ageing tradition gives a generally smooth, rounded, comforting profile that many find gentler and less challenging than fierce young sheng. It overlaps most with shou pu-erh in the cup, both being smooth dark teas, but a good Liu Bao carries its own aromatic sweetness rather than shou's soil-and-wood earthiness. Neither is better; they are cousins, not the same tea, and naming that accurately turns Liu Bao from "a cheap pu-erh substitute" into the distinct tea it actually is.

How to brew it well

Treat it like a forgiving dark tea: plenty of leaf, a small pot or gaiwan, a quick rinse of the leaves, water at a full 95 to 100C, and many short, increasing infusions. Aged Liu Bao is mellow and hard to over brew into anything really harsh; it also takes well to longer, relaxed brewing and even thermos style steeping, which is

part of its everyday appeal. As with all aged dark teas, the rinse both wakes the leaf and washes off any storage dust.

Quality and storage

As with shou, good Liu Bao is clean, smooth and sweetly woody; flavours that are plainly musty, mouldy or pond like are spoilage, not age, and the sensible response is to reject such tea rather than romanticise it. Because it is fermented and aged, sourcing and storage matter, so buy from reputable sellers and keep it like other dark tea, in stable, dry-ish, odour-free conditions. Big age and grade claims attract the same scepticism as everywhere in this family, so judge the cup, the same discipline the how to judge tea quality guide trains.

Is Liu Bao good for you

Liu Bao is true tea, so the package is the familiar one: caffeine and polyphenols, nothing miraculous. Liu Bao carries the same folklore as pu erh about meals and body weight, and the position is the same: those are traditional beliefs and marketing, not demonstrated clinical effects. The real reason to drink Liu Bao is that a good aged one is a deeply comforting, distinctive dark tea, and that, not any claim, is its appeal.

Liu Bao and shou pu-erh, side by side

Aspect	Answer
Category	Hei cha (dark post-fermented), its own category
Origin	Guangxi (not Yunnan, so not pu-erh)
Signature	Sweet, woody, "betel nut" note; smooth, rounded
Against shou pu-erh	Cousins, not the same; Liu Bao more aromatically sweet
Brewing	Rinse, 95 to 100C, many short infusions, forgiving
Claims about the body	Standard tea story; meal and weight folklore unproven

The single idea to carry away is the one the whole dark-tea family turns on: judge the cup, not the legend. A clean, smooth, sweetly woody cup is the proof of quality, while mustiness is spoilage to reject. Bought from a reputable seller and stored stable and free of odours, Liu Bao is a rewarding everyday dark tea, with no story about the body required. Explore it across the dark tea selection, the Chinese tea range, or the full tea shop.

Worth keeping on the shelf around this article: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. The full tea shop is open for Liu Bao and other dark teas, with UK delivery free from £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Don't pay pu-erh prices for the name alone. Liu Bao is its own dark tea and often the better value.

More from the tea wiki

- Dark tea
- Pu-erh tea
- Pu-erh ageing
- Shou vs sheng
- How to brew pu-erh
- Gongfu tea

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/