Kukicha: It Is Not Made From Scraps

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Kukicha, in summary:** Kukicha is a deliberate, light, sweet, naturally lower-caffeine Japanese tea made from stems, not a downgrade. Karigane is its premium form. "Made from scraps" is the one myth worth clearing.

Kukicha is the Japanese tea that sounds like a leftover and is actually a deliberate, distinctive drink, so the job here is to clear away the "made from scraps" assumption. Kukicha, also called twig tea or bocha, is made largely from the stems, stalks and twigs of the tea plant rather than the leaves, often the parts separated out during the making of sencha or gyokuro. That origin is real, but framing it as inferior misses the point: kukicha is valued precisely because stems give a different, lighter, sweeter cup that leaf tea cannot.

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

What kukicha actually is

When sencha and especially gyokuro are processed, leaf is separated from stem and twig. Those stems, far from being waste, are sorted and sold as kukicha. The best kukicha, called karigane when it comes from high-grade gyokuro or sencha stems, carries some of the sweetness and umami of the shaded leaf it accompanied. The brew is pale, light bodied, gently sweet, faintly creamy or nutty and remarkably smooth, quite different from a brisk leaf sencha, and a deliberate choice rather than a compromise. "Made from stems" describes what it is, not a verdict on what it is worth.

Why it is naturally low in caffeine

This is kukicha's most useful selling point. Caffeine concentrates in the young leaves and buds, not in the woody stems, so a tea made mostly of stems is naturally lower in caffeine than leaf green tea, without any decaffeination process. That makes good kukicha a sensible choice for later in the day, for the caffeine-sensitive, or for anyone who wants a real green tea experience with less of the stimulant. It is "lower", not "zero": true tea still contains some caffeine, so the accurate claim is a real reduction, not a caffeine free promise.

How to brew it well

Kukicha is more forgiving than delicate leaf greens but still Japanese green in spirit. Water around 70 to 80C and a short steep gives the cleanest, sweetest cup; it tolerates slightly hotter water better than sencha because stems are less prone to the harsh bitterness young leaves throw, but boiling water still flattens its delicate sweetness. It re-steeps well for a pleasant, consistent few infusions, and a high-grade karigane rewards the same cooler, careful treatment as the gyokuro it came from.

Is kukicha good for you

Kukicha is true tea, so expect the usual: some caffeine, polyphenols and L theanine, no miracle, with one real, specific difference: it is naturally lower in caffeine than leaf green tea because of the stem content. That is a real, useful property, not a superpower, and any claim beyond it is the usual marketing. The real appeal is a gentle, sweet, low caffeine everyday brew.

Claim versus reality at a glance

Assumption	Reality
"Made from scraps, inferior"	Deliberate stem tea, a different lighter sweeter cup
Karigane	Premium kukicha from gyokuro or sencha stems
"Caffeine-free"	Naturally lower, not zero; still real tea
Brewing	70 to 80C, short, more forgiving than leaf greens
Bigger claims	Standard tea story plus a real lower caffeine point

Choose kukicha for exactly what it clearly is: a deliberate, light, sweet, naturally lower-caffeine Japanese tea made from the stems most people never think about, not a downgrade. The stems give a distinct sweetness and a real caffeine reduction with a clear mechanism, neither of which leaf tea provides, so it is a different tool rather than a lesser one. Brew it cool-ish and short, re-steep it, and explore it across the green tea range , the Japanese green tea family, or the full tea shop.

Day-to-day teas that sit alongside this one: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Find more in the tea shop; UK delivery is free over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Kukicha is stalks by design, not leftovers. Judge it on the light, sweet cup, not the unusual look.

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Kabusecha
- Gyokuro
- Sencha

- Sencha, gyokuro and bancha
- Green tea and caffeine

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/