Tencha: The Leaf That Becomes Matcha

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tencha, in summary:** Tencha is the shaded, unrolled Japanese green leaf that is stone-ground into matcha. Matcha is not its own crop, it is ground tencha, which is why understanding tencha explains matcha quality and price.

Tencha is the tea most matcha drinkers consume every day without ever knowing its name, and explaining it clearly demystifies matcha itself. Tencha is the finished leaf, shade-grown, steamed, dried, and de-stemmed and de-veined, that is then stone-ground into matcha. In other words, matcha is not its own crop; it is ground tencha. Understanding tencha is the clearest way to see what actually determines matcha quality, which makes it one of the most useful pages in this whole cluster.

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

What tencha actually is

Tencha is made much like the leaf destined for gyokuro: the plants are shaded for several weeks before harvest to build sweetness and L-theanine and reduce bitterness. The processing then diverges crucially. Tencha is steamed and dried without being rolled, and the stems and veins are carefully removed, leaving only flat, pure leaf flake. That unrolled, de-veined flake is tencha. It is light, papery and green, and almost all of it goes straight to the stone mills to become matcha rather than being sold to drink.

Why tencha is rarely drunk as leaf

The answer is simple and clarifying: tencha is not processed to be steeped. Because it is unrolled and de-veined, it does not infuse the way rolled sencha or gyokuro does; steeped, it gives a delicate, pale, mild liquor that is pleasant but underwhelming compared with what the same leaf delivers when ground and whisked whole as matcha. A small amount is sold as a gentle, low-key loose tea and it is a quietly lovely curiosity, but gyokuro is the better loose-leaf alternative if you want that shaded character in a cup. Tencha exists overwhelmingly as the raw material for matcha, and that is its job rather than a criticism.

What tencha reveals about matcha quality

This is the genuinely practical payoff. Because matcha is just ground tencha, matcha quality is decided before grinding, by the tencha: how young and well-shaded the leaf was, how cleanly it was de-veined and de-stemmed (stem and vein content makes matcha duller and more bitter), and how carefully it was

processed. The grinding matters too, slow stone grinding for a fine, cool powder, but no grinding rescues poor tencha. This is why the matcha grades candour holds: "ceremonial" versus "culinary" is really a statement about the tencha behind the powder, and a seller who talks about leaf source and harvest is telling you about the tencha that actually sets the quality, the same know-the-leaf habit the matcha grades guide develops.

How to brew it (if you find it)

If you do get drinking tencha, treat it as a very delicate shaded green: cool water (around 60 to 70C), a short steep, gentle handling, and modest expectations, because it is soft, sweet and subtle rather than bold. Most people, though, will only ever meet tencha as the matcha in their bowl, which is exactly how it is meant to be enjoyed.

Is tencha good for you

It is true green tea, so the story is the standard one: caffeine, catechins, L-theanine, hydration, no miracle. As shaded leaf it is naturally richer in L-theanine, the same fair, modest, real point made about gyokuro and matcha, not a special power. The genuine value of knowing tencha is understanding: the moment you grasp that matcha is ground tencha, the entire matcha quality and matcha grade story stops being mysterious and starts making clear sense.

Tencha at a glance

Aspect	Answer
What it is	Shaded Japanese green leaf, steamed and dried without rolling, then stone-ground into matcha
Pre-grinding state	Flat, de-stemmed, de-veined leaf flake; this is tencha
Shading	Around 3 to 4 weeks before harvest, like gyokuro
Drunk as leaf?	Rarely; designed for grinding, and gyokuro is the better loose-leaf alternative
If brewed	Light, soft umami; pleasant but less refined than the same leaf as matcha
Quality signal	Matcha quality is set by the tencha behind it, not just the grinding
Why it matters	Knowing matcha is ground tencha explains matcha's wide price range

The one idea to carry away is that matcha is ground tencha, so the quality and price of any matcha trace back to the leaf before it ever reached the mill. The companion matcha and Japanese green tea guides build on that, and you can compare a ceremonial matcha against a culinary one from the matcha range or the full tea shop.

Same shelf, same shop: the green tea range and matcha range.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Try the cheapest plain version of the style first. Upgrade only after you've decided you like the style.

More from the tea wiki

Continue with matcha, sencha, Japanese green tea, hojicha, the Uji tea region and how to make 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/