

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.

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Tencha: The Leaf That Becomes Matcha. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tencha-explained/>*

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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What tencha actually is , Tencha: The Leaf That Becomes Matcha. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tencha-explained/>*

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

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Why tencha is rarely drunk as leaf , Tencha: The Leaf That Becomes Matcha. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tencha-explained/>*

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 purpose rather than a criticism.

What tencha reveals about matcha quality

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What tencha reveals about matcha quality*, *Tencha: The Leaf That Becomes Matcha*. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tencha-explained/>

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)

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for How to brew it (if you find it)*, *Tencha: The Leaf That Becomes Matcha*. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/tencha-explained/>

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

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Aspect	Answer
What it is	Shaded Japanese green leaf, steamed and dried without rolling, then stone-ground into matcha

Aspect	Answer
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](#).

Reference noted

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- [EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine \(2015\)](#)

Same shelf, same shop: the [green tea range](#) and [matcha range](#).

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