Taiping Houkui: The Giant Leaf Green Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Taiping Houkui, in summary:** Taiping Houkui ("Monkey Chief") is a premium Chinese green from Anhui with huge, flat, sword-like leaves and an orchid-floral cup. It is prized for elegance, not strength, so brew it in a tall glass, cool and unhurried.

Taiping Houkui is the most visually startling famous Chinese green tea, with enormous, flat, pressed leaves that can be several centimetres long, and the job here is to explain why that dramatic appearance is genuine craft rather than a gimmick, while keeping expectations realistic. It is a real, distinguished tea, official tea of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, not a novelty, but it is also a tea whose looks are part of its marketing, and saying both clearly is the useful position.

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

What Taiping Houkui actually is

It is a green tea from the Taiping area of Anhui (the named villages of Hou Keng and Hou Gang are the top tier), made from the large-leaf Shi Da Cha cultivar picked as a bud with two leaves, then gently flattened, traditionally pressed by hand between wire-mesh screens, into long, straight, flat blades, often with a faint net pattern from the pressing. The processing is skilled and labour-intensive. In the cup it is pale, clear, exceptionally smooth and mellow, low in bitterness, with a clean vegetal sweetness and a distinctive, prized orchid fragrance. The character is gentle and elegant rather than bold, which surprises people expecting a big tea to taste big.

Why the huge leaves are not a gimmick

The size and flattening are functional and traditional, not theatre. The cultivar genuinely has large leaves; the pressing shapes them, helps lock in the orchid aroma, and gives the smooth, low-astringency cup the style is known for, and because the leaf is so large it gives up its flavour more slowly than fine broken leaf, which supports longer steeps. That said, it is fair to acknowledge the dramatic appearance also sells the tea and is used to justify premium pricing, and that there is a wide quality range: top hand-pressed Houkui is a connoisseur tea, while machine-made versions are flatter in flavour as well as in leaf. The looks are real craft and a marketing asset at once, and the careful buyer holds both ideas.

Setting the expectation

Because it looks so imposing, people often expect an intense, powerful brew and are puzzled by how delicate and subtle it actually is. Taiping Houkui is prized precisely for elegance, smoothness and aroma, not strength; judging it as "weak" misunderstands the style, much as expecting a fine Mao Feng to be brisk does. Set the expectation correctly, a refined, fragrant, gentle tea, and it delivers; expect a bruiser and you will feel let down by one of China's finest greens.

How to brew it well

The large flat leaves want room, so a tall glass tumbler or a roomy pot suits them both practically and visually, letting the leaves stand and unfurl, which is a genuine part of the pleasure. Use water around 75 to 85C, never boiling, and a gentle, not-too-short steep of a few minutes, because the big leaves release flavour more slowly than fine, broken leaf, so it can take a touch longer than a delicate bud tea while still hating real heat. It re-steeps well. Forcing it with boiling water ruins the orchid delicacy that is the entire point.

Is Taiping Houkui good for you

It is true green tea, so the story is the standard one: caffeine, catechins, some L-theanine, hydration, no miracle. Its dramatic form changes flavour and presentation, not pharmacology, and any health framing is the usual marketing. The genuine reward is a uniquely elegant, orchid-scented, smooth cup in a leaf unlike any other tea on earth, and that sensory and visual distinction is reason enough.

Taiping Houkui at a glance

Aspect	Note
What it is	Premium Chinese green tea; "Monkey Chief"
Origin	Taiping county, Huangshan, Anhui, China
Cultivar	Shi Da Cha, a large-leaf variety
Visual	Flat, sword-like leaves up to around 15cm long
Cup character	Orchid-floral; sweet, vegetal; persistent
Production	Labour-intensive hand-pressing; premium pricing
Brewing	75 to 85C, a few minutes; tall glass to enjoy the leaf
Pricing	Roughly £15 to £40 per 50g for authentic

On authenticity, hold the name apart from the cup: genuine Houkui has long sword-like leaves with visible parallel veining and a one-bud-two-leaf set, comes from the Taiping area, and is hand-pressed, with the orchid-floral aroma and persistent sweet finish as the real proof. Hand-pressed examples sit at the premium tier; suspiciously cheap "Taiping Houkui" is usually a machine-made or borrowed-name substitute, so buy from candid sellers and judge what cannot be faked, the same test the how to judge tea quality guide trains. The companion Chinese green tea and Long Jing guides cover the wider family, and you can source it from the Chinese green range, with a tall glass, the brand directory, or the full tea shop.

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