Liu An Gua Pian: The Budless Famous Green

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Liu An Gua Pian, in summary:** Liu An Gua Pian is the famous Chinese green made deliberately from leaf alone, no bud and no stem, trading tippy delicacy for real body and mellow smoothness. It is a different look chosen by the makers, not a downgrade.

Liu An Gua Pian, often called "Melon Seed" tea for the shape of its leaves, is unique among China's famous green teas in a way that makes it an ideal clarity lesson: it is the only famous green tea made deliberately from the leaf alone, with no bud and no stem. Almost every other prestige green chases tender buds and downy tips; Liu An Gua Pian deliberately rejects them. Explaining why that is a considered choice, not a shortcut, is the whole value of this page.

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

What Liu An Gua Pian actually is

It is a pan-fired green tea from the Lu An area of Anhui, made from single mature leaves, specifically not the bud and not including stem, each leaf processed individually and pan-fired, traditionally finished over charcoal, into a curled, glossy, melon-seed shape. The cup is full-bodied for a green tea, mellow, sweetly vegetal, sometimes lightly toasty from the firing, with notable smoothness and a clean, lingering finish. It manages to be substantial without the sharp astringency that mature leaf might suggest, which is exactly the point of the craft.

Why "no bud, no stem" is deliberate

This is the core, and it cleanly exposes a bias most drinkers do not know they have: that buds and tips equal quality. That heuristic is usually a reasonable shortcut, downy tippy leaf often does signal a delicate prestige green, but Liu An Gua Pian is the deliberate counter-example that proves it is a shortcut, not a law. Buds give delicacy, downiness and high amino acids; the mature leaf carries more of what gives body, depth and a satisfying mouthfeel. Its makers chose, by long tradition, to use only the leaf, then used skilled pan-firing and charcoal finishing to keep that bigger leaf smooth rather than harsh. So a budless tea here is the result of more craft, not less, and judging it by bud-tea standards is simply the wrong yardstick.

Setting the expectation

Because prestige-green marketing trains drinkers to prize tippy, downy, delicate teas, a budless tea can wrongly seem inferior. Liu An Gua Pian chooses a different aesthetic: it trades the fragile finesse of a Bi Luo Chun for body, smoothness and deep mellow sweetness. Neither is better; expecting bud tea delicacy from it, or dismissing it for lacking tips, both miss what it really does well. It is the same careful clarity the whole family rewards, judge a tea by its own intended style.

How to brew it well

Treat it as sturdy, for a green leaf tea. Use water around 80 to 90C, a little hotter than the most delicate bud greens because mature leaf both tolerates and needs slightly more heat to give its body, but still not a hard boil, which scorches it. Use a generous amount of leaf and a moderate steep, and re-steep several times; the second and third infusions are often beautifully smooth, and the charcoal-finished examples reward patient, repeated short brews.

Is Liu An Gua Pian good for you

Liu An Gua Pian is true green tea, so expect the standard package: caffeine and catechins, and no miracle. Being mature leaf rather than bud, its compound balance differs slightly from tippy greens, but it remains ordinary green tea with nothing special to offer the body, and any claim otherwise is the usual marketing. The real reward is a distinctive, full bodied, smooth green tea unlike any tippy famous green, and that singular character is reason enough.

Liu An Gua Pian at a glance

Aspect	Answer
What it is	Pan-fired Anhui green, single mature leaves, "Melon Seed"
The deliberate choice	No bud, no stem, leaf only, for body and smoothness
Cup	Full-bodied, mellow, sweetly vegetal, lightly toasty
Wrong yardstick	Judging it by tippy bud-tea delicacy
Brewing	80 to 90C (a touch hotter than bud greens), re-steep
Claims beyond taste	Standard green tea story, nothing special

The takeaway generalises beyond this one tea: the useful question with any famous leaf is not "does it match the tippy prestige template" but "is it good at the style it set out to be". Liu An Gua Pian set out to be a full-bodied, smooth, mellow green and succeeds at exactly that. The companion Chinese green tea and how to judge tea quality guides develop the same habit, and you can explore it across the green tea range, the Chinese tea selection, or the full tea shop.

Easy picks alongside this one: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. For more, the full tea shop ships free across the UK over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · A pot of good melon seed leaf, brewed slowly, beats five exotic bags rushed.

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