Gong Mei: The White Tea Confused With Shou Mei

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Gong Mei, in summary:** Gong Mei is the leafy white tea most often confused with Shou Mei, the fuller, mellower end of the family. The distinction is real but loosely applied in the trade, so judge the picking and the cup, not the label.

Gong Mei is the white tea grade that causes the most confusion, because it sits right next to Shou Mei and is frequently merged with it or labelled loosely. The single most useful clarification is that Gong Mei is, broadly, a leafy white tea similar in spirit to Shou Mei but traditionally distinguished by leaf source and picking, and that the line between them is thoroughly blurred in the market. Saying that the distinction is real but loosely applied is clearer than pretending there is a crisp, universally agreed definition.

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

What Gong Mei actually is

Gong Mei ("tribute eyebrow") is a Fujian white tea made from buds and leaves of a leafier, later-picked standard than White Peony, withered and dried by the standard minimal white-tea method. It is traditionally described as sitting between White Peony and Shou Mei, or as a particular leafy grade distinguished by the tea variety or bush type used, with a little more bud presence or refinement than the leafiest Shou Mei. The cup is sturdy, sweetly mellow, hay and dried fruit in character, closer to Shou Mei than to the delicate finer whites.

Gong Mei versus Shou Mei, without the sales talk

This is the core candour. In practice, the labels Gong Mei and Shou Mei are used inconsistently by different producers and sellers: some treat Gong Mei as a slightly higher leafy grade than Shou Mei, some use the names almost interchangeably, and definitions vary by region and tradition. Rather than pretend to a false precision, the guidance is simple: expect a full flavoured, leafy, inexpensive white in the Shou Mei family, do not assume the name alone signals a meaningful quality step, and judge the described picking and the actual cup rather than the label word. Do not spend energy policing whether a given tea is "really" Gong Mei or Shou Mei, because the trade itself does not draw a hard line.

Where it sits in the family

Placed on the family map: Silver Needle (buds only, finest, dearest), White Peony (bud plus young leaf, the value sweet spot), then Gong Mei and Shou Mei (leafier, later, sturdy, cheap, and the best agers). The ladder describes leaf and plucking, not a quality rank, so Gong Mei generally lives in that hardy, affordable zone with Shou Mei. None of this makes it a poor tea; like Shou Mei it is a good everyday white and a sound, often excellent candidate for ageing, and it should be valued for that rather than dismissed for lacking buds.

How to brew it well

Treat it like Shou Mei, because in the cup it largely behaves like it. Use a generous amount of leaf, water at the hotter end of the white range (around 85 to 95C, near boiling for aged or pressed Gong Mei), and a patient, even long steep; the leafy body tolerates and rewards heat and time far better than delicate Silver Needle. It re-steeps well and, aged, brews beautifully long and relaxed. As with all white tea, milk and sugar would bury the gentle character and are best left out.

Is Gong Mei good for you

It is real white tea: caffeine, polyphenols and no miracle, plus the same lofty "super tea" and "aged white does more" marketing as the rest of the family. The fair position is the same too: a good polyphenol source, not a demonstrated wonder, and ageing changes flavour, not proven health. The real reward is a full flavoured, affordable, ageable everyday white, valued for what it is rather than for a label distinction the market itself applies loosely.

Gong Mei at a glance

Aspect	The read
What it is	A leafy white tea grade, between White Peony and Shou Mei
Against Shou Mei	Often merged or loosely labelled; the real confusion
Character	Fuller, darker, mellower than delicate White Peony
Ageing	Like other white tea, it can age and deepen
Brew	Generous leaf, hot water, patient steeps

The note most often missed is ageing: a fuller white like Gong Mei is one of the better candidates for deliberate keeping, mellowing and deepening over years if kept dry, dark and away from strong odours, so a tea that seems merely pleasant young can become properly characterful with patience. Read the ladder, judge the cup, store it sensibly, and the loose labelling stops mattering. The companion white tea, White Peony and Shou Mei guides set the family in order, the how to store tea guide covers the keeping, and you can find it across the loose leaf range or the full tea shop.

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teas · Two or three good bags of white tea get you to the £35 mark where UK delivery turns

free. Mix leaf grades in a small order instead of a single splurge.

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