Tea Brewing Temperature: The Master Dial

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tea brewing temperature, in summary:** Temperature is the most consequential brewing variable. The more delicate and less processed the leaf, the cooler the water; robust black and tisanes want a full boil, delicate greens and whites do not.

If you fix only one thing about how you make tea, make it water temperature, because it is the single most consequential brewing variable and the one most people get wrong. The headline is blunt: pouring fully boiling water onto delicate teas is the most common reason people think they dislike green, white or fine oolong tea, when in fact they have only ever tasted those teas scalded.

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

Why temperature matters so much

Hotter water extracts faster and pulls more of everything, including the bitter, astringent compounds (catechins and, with over-extraction, a harsh tannic edge) that ruin delicate teas. Robust, fully oxidised or roasted teas have the structure to take very hot water and actually need it to give their body; delicate, lightly processed teas do not, and boiling water strips out their sweetness and aroma while forcing out bitterness. Temperature is essentially a control dial for the balance between a tea's pleasant and harsh compounds, which is why it matters more than almost anything else.

The type-by-type guide

Approximate but reliable. Black tea (robust, breakfast, most CTC): a full 95 to 100C. Roasted or heavily oxidised oolong, pu-erh, aged dark tea: 95 to 100C. Lightly oxidised oolong: around 85 to 95C. Most green tea: 75 to 85C. Delicate Japanese greens (sencha) and fine Chinese greens: around 70 to 80C. Gyokuro: unusually cool, 50 to 60C. White tea: 80 to 90C (cooler for delicate Silver Needle). Yellow tea: 75 to 85C. Herbal and fruit tisanes: full boiling, 100C, because there is no tea leaf to scald and the botanicals need the heat. The pattern is simple: the more delicate and less processed, the cooler.

How to do it without a thermometer

You do not need a gadget. Boiling water is 100C; if you let a just-boiled kettle stand with the lid off, it falls roughly 10C every minute or so in a normal room, so about 80C is roughly five minutes off the boil and 90C a couple of minutes. Alternatively, boil and then add a splash of room-temperature water to a delicate-tea

pot to knock the heat down. A variable-temperature kettle removes the guesswork and is the one piece of tea kit that genuinely earns its cost, but the standing-and-cooling method is free and works.

The nuance

Two fair caveats keep this accurate. First, temperature works together with time and leaf quantity: slightly too-hot water with a very short steep can still give a decent cup, which is why some people brew delicate teas hot but fast. Second, these are starting points, not laws; tea, taste and water vary, so the real skill is tasting and adjusting. But the core frankness stands: when in doubt with any lightly processed tea, cooler is safer than hotter, and "use boiling water for everything" is the single most damaging piece of common tea advice.

Does temperature change the health story

Marginally, and not usefully. Hotter water extracts more polyphenols and caffeine faster, so a near-boiling long brew is somewhat stronger, but every cup, brewed well or badly, is still ordinary true tea: caffeine, polyphenols, hydration, no miracle. One genuine, separate safety note unrelated to flavour: very hot drinks of any kind are best allowed to cool slightly before drinking, which is general sense, not a tea-specific claim. The reason to master temperature is flavour.

Temperature by tea type

Tea	Water	Why
Black, breakfast, most CTC	95 to 100C, full boil	Robust, needs heat for body
Roasted/heavy oolong, pu-erh, dark	95 to 100C	Structure takes a full boil
Lightly oxidised oolong	85 to 95C	Aroma survives, bitterness held back
Most green tea	75 to 85C	Sweetness kept, scald avoided
Fine sencha / fine Chinese green	70 to 80C	Delicate, easily scalded
Gyokuro	50 to 60C	Shaded leaf, very heat-sensitive
White / Silver Needle	80 to 90C (cooler for Silver Needle)	Light processing
Yellow tea	75 to 85C	Delicate, lightly processed
Herbal and fruit tisanes	100C, full boil	No tea leaf to scald; botanicals need heat

If you change only one habit, make it this: stop pouring fully boiling water onto delicate tea. Let the kettle cool, or add a splash of cold, and check with a thermometer so delicate leaf gets roughly 70 to 85C, while robust black and tisanes keep the full boil they actually need. Everything else, time, leaf quantity, re-steeping, is refinement on top of getting that one dial right, and it costs nothing, the recurring theme of the common tea brewing mistakes guide. A leaf worth the care is in the loose leaf range or the full tea shop.

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