Resteeping Tea: Many Cups From One Leaf

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Re-steeping tea, in summary:** Good whole-leaf tea gives several evolving cups, not a faded copy. Oolong, pu-erh and whole-leaf green and white re-steep best, teabags barely at all, and judging by price per cup rather than per packet changes the economics.

Re-steeping, brewing the same leaves more than once, is normal practice across much of the tea-drinking world and almost unknown in the typical British kitchen, where the bag goes in the bin after one cup. Done with the right tea it is better value and, often, better tasting. This page explains which teas re-steep well, how to do it, and what to expect.

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

What re-steeping is

Re-steeping (also called multiple infusions) simply means using the same tea leaves for several successive brews rather than discarding them after one. Good loose-leaf tea has far more to give than a single cup extracts, and in the gongfu style of brewing, common in China and beyond, a single portion of leaf may be infused many times, each infusion short and each subtly different. The single-use teabag is a relatively recent industrial habit, not a universal truth about tea; across China, Japan, Taiwan and much of the world, a single cup from quality leaf would be considered wasteful.

Why later infusions differ

Each infusion draws out compounds at a different rate, so successive cups are a curve, not a fading photocopy. The first is typically brisk, aromatic and slightly sharp; the second and third are often the sweetest, roundest and most balanced as the leaf fully opens; later ones grow lighter, gentler and more delicate. Following that arc is the actual pleasure of re-steeping, which is why people who do it rarely consider the first cup the best. Expecting "weaker each time" misses the point; "different, often better in the middle" is the accurate picture.

Which teas re-steep well

Tea	Re-steeps?	Notes
Oolong	Excellent	Many infusions, evolves beautifully
Pu-erh and aged tea	Excellent	Built for many short infusions

Tea	Re-steeps?	Notes
Whole-leaf green and white	Good	2 to 4 gentle infusions
Whole-leaf black	Fair	Often 2, sometimes 3
Teabags, dust and fannings	Poor	Designed to give everything at once

The pattern is clear: good whole-leaf tea, especially oolong, pu-erh and aged white, is made to be re-steeped, while a standard teabag is engineered to release everything in one strong, fast cup and has little left for a second.

How to do it

The key adjustment is time. Use a reasonable quantity of leaf, keep the first infusion fairly short, and then extend each subsequent infusion a little, tasting as you go, because the leaves give up flavour more slowly once opened. The one habit that matters is pouring the tea fully off the leaves each time rather than leaving them stewing, so anything that separates leaf from liquid quickly, a gaiwan, a teapot with a generous strainer, or an infuser you can lift out, turns the whole thing into no extra work: brew, pour off completely, top up for the next infusion. Re-steep within a few hours rather than leaving wet leaves overnight.

Western mug versus gongfu

There are two practical approaches. The Western way uses more water, fewer leaves and longer steeps, and typically gives one to three good infusions, which suits a busy kitchen. The gongfu way uses a lot of leaf, a little water and very short steeps, and gives many infusions that change cup to cup. Neither is wrong; the gongfu approach simply makes the evolving-infusion pleasure obvious and is worth trying once with a good oolong to see what re-steeping can actually do.

Re-steeping and caffeine

A practical point often misunderstood: a good deal of a tea's caffeine comes out in the first infusion, so later steeps are generally gentler on caffeine as well as lighter in briskness. This is one reason the afternoon and evening infusions of a re-steeped tea can be a pleasant, softer drink. It is not a way to make tea caffeine-free, real tea always contains some, but a long re-steeping session naturally tapers rather than delivering full strength every cup.

The value point

Re-steeping quietly changes the economics of good tea. A loose leaf tea that costs more per gram than a teabag but gives three or four proper cups from one measure is often cheaper per cup, as well as better. It is also the fastest way to understand quality: a cheap, dusty tea collapses after one infusion, while a good whole-leaf tea unfolds across several. Judging tea by price per packet rather than price per cup is one of the most common mistakes, and re-steeping is the reason the two are not the same. The shift is mostly a change of expectation, not equipment, so the companion aged white tea and cold brew guides are worth a look, and a leaf worth re-steeping is in the loose leaf range or the full tea shop.

Day-to-day teas that sit alongside this one: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. There is plenty more in the tea shop, and leaves worth steeping again post free in the UK above £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Pick what you'll actually drink every day. A leaf you keep steeping earns more than a tin you only admire.

More from the tea wiki

- Loose leaf vs teabag
- Oolong tea
- Gongfu cha
- Tea and caffeine

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/