Cold Brew Tea: Smooth Iced Tea, Never Bitter

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Cold brew tea, in summary:** Cold brew steeps tea in cold water for hours, giving a smooth, sweet, never-bitter iced tea. Cold water extracts slowly and selectively, so it is almost impossible to make harsh.

Cold brew tea is tea steeped slowly in cold water instead of being made hot and then chilled. It is the easiest way to make really good iced tea at home, it almost never turns bitter, and it tastes noticeably different from hot tea poured over ice. This page explains how and why it works, and how to do it well.

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What it is, and how it differs from iced tea

There are two routes to a cold cup. The familiar one is brewing tea hot and strong, then cooling it and pouring it over ice. Cold brew is different: the leaves or bag steep in cold water, in the fridge, for several hours, and are never heated at all. The result is smoother, sweeter and far less bitter, because of what hot water does that cold water does not.

Why cold brew is never bitter

Heat is an aggressive, fast solvent: it rapidly extracts tannins and caffeine, the compounds most responsible for bitterness and astringency, which is why hot tea over-steeped turns sharp. Cold water works slowly and more selectively, drawing out the sweeter, more aromatic, more delicate compounds while leaving most of the harsh tannins in the leaf. That single difference, slow and selective rather than fast and total, is the whole reason cold brew tastes clean and smooth even from a tea that would turn bitter brewed hot and forgotten. You essentially cannot over-extract it into bitterness the way you can with hot tea.

How to do it

Step	Guidance
Leaf	About 1.5x the leaf you would use hot, per litre
Water	Cold, filtered, straight into a jug
Time	6 to 12 hours in the fridge (longer for stronger)
Finish	Strain, serve over ice, keep refrigerated

Put the tea and cold water in a jug or bottle, refrigerate for six to twelve hours, strain out the leaves and drink within a day or two. There is no kettle, no timing anxiety and almost no way to ruin it, and no need to sweeten heavily because cold brew is naturally smoother and a little sweeter than hot-brewed iced tea.

Which teas work best

Almost anything works, but some shine. Green tea becomes remarkably smooth and sweet without its hot-brew grassiness. White tea is delicate and lovely, and oolong is excellent and complex. Fruit and herbal infusions make superb, naturally sweet, caffeine-free coolers. Bright, sturdy blacks such as Nilgiri give a clean iced black that does not cloud. Delicate or expensive whole-leaf teas reward cold brewing most, because their subtlety is preserved rather than scorched, and stale tea gives a dull cold brew just as it gives a dull hot one; cold brewing rewards good leaf, it does not rescue bad leaf.

Caffeine, and the gentler cup

Because cold water extracts caffeine more slowly than hot, a cold brew is often a little gentler than the same tea brewed strong and hot, though it still contains caffeine if made from real tea and steeped long. For a cold drink with no caffeine at all, cold brew a fruit or herbal infusion, which gives all the refreshment and none of the caffeine.

Flavouring and serving ideas

Cold brew is an excellent base to build on. A few slices of citrus, a sprig of mint, a little ginger or some fresh berries added to the jug during the steep infuse cleanly in the cold water and turn a simple cold brew into something that rivals a bought soft drink with no sugar. Served long over ice and sweetened lightly only if needed, cold brew is one of the cheapest really refreshing drinks you can make, and it scales easily to a jug for a table of people. Make a large jug the night before, strain in the morning, and serve through the day; it holds its clean flavour for a day or two refrigerated.

Common mistakes

The few ways cold brew goes wrong are easy to avoid. Too little leaf gives a watery result, so use more than you would hot. Too short a time under-extracts, so give it the hours. Leaving the leaves in for days rather than straining after the steep eventually makes it heavy and over-tannic even cold. Get those right and, once you have tasted a good cold-brewed green or oolong beside the same tea brewed hot and iced, the slight planning stops feeling like effort. A leaf worth cold-brewing is in the green tea range or the full tea shop.

The everyday teas in the same family: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Wander the tea shop for the rest of the range worth cold brewing, and UK delivery is free from £35.

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