

# 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.

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Cold Brew Tea: Smooth Iced Tea, Never Bitter. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cold-brew-tea-explained/>*

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 genuinely good iced tea at home, it is almost impossible to make 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.

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

## What it is, and how it differs from iced tea

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What it is, and how it differs from iced tea , Cold Brew Tea: Smooth Iced Tea, Never Bitter. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cold-brew-tea-explained/>*

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

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Cold Brew Tea: Smooth Iced Tea, Never Bitter. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cold-brew-tea-explained/*

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

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Which teas work best, Cold Brew Tea: Smooth Iced Tea, Never Bitter. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cold-brew-tea-explained/*

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 robust 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

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Caffeine, and the gentler cup, Cold Brew Tea: Smooth Iced Tea, Never Bitter. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cold-brew-tea-explained/*

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 genuinely caffeine-free cold drink, cold brew a fruit or herbal infusion, which gives all the refreshment and none of the caffeine.

## Flavouring and serving ideas

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Flavouring and serving ideas, Cold Brew Tea: Smooth Iced Tea, Never Bitter. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cold-brew-tea-explained/*

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, lightly sweetened only if needed, it is one of the cheapest genuinely refreshing drinks you can make, and it scales effortlessly 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

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Common mistakes , Cold Brew Tea: Smooth Iced Tea, Never Bitter. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cold-brew-tea-explained/*

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](#).

## Reference noted

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Reference noted , Cold Brew Tea: Smooth Iced Tea, Never Bitter. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cold-brew-tea-explained/*

- [EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine \(2015\)](#)

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 wider range, with free UK delivery from £35.

**FROM THE CURATOR** *teas* · Start cheap, stay cheap until something stops you. Most rich teas reward patience, not budget.

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Cold Brew Tea: Smooth Iced Tea, Never Bitter. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/cold-brew-tea-explained/*

## More from the tea wiki

- [Green tea](#)
- [Oolong tea](#)
- [Herbal tea](#)
- [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](mailto:hello@teas.co.uk) · 3-click cancel at [teas.co.uk/cancel/](https://teas.co.uk/cancel/)