The Fairness Pitcher (Gong Dao Bei): Even Cups Every Time

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **The fairness pitcher, in summary:** The fairness pitcher (gong dao bei) evens out strength: decant the whole brew into it at once so every cup is equal and the leaf stops steeping. Cheap, simple, and well worth it if you brew gongfu or pour for more than one.

The fairness pitcher (gong dao bei, literally "cup of fairness") is one of the least glamorous and most useful pieces of tea equipment. Unlike much tea kit, it solves a real, specific problem so well that it earns its place on function alone, with almost no mystique attached. It is the clear opposite of a status object.

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

What it actually is and what it solves

A fairness pitcher is a small jug into which you pour the entire brew from the gaiwan or pot before serving. It solves two real problems. First, evenness within a brew: tea continues extracting while it sits, and the liquor is not uniform top to bottom, so decanting it all at once into the pitcher mixes it and every cup poured from the pitcher is identical in strength, hence "fairness", everyone gets the same cup. Second, it stops over-extraction: emptying the pot completely into the pitcher ends the steep precisely, instead of leaving leaves stewing between pours. Both are real gongfu problems, and the pitcher fixes them well.

Why it is one of the most useful pieces of kit

In gongfu brewing, where short, repeated infusions and complete pour-offs are the whole method, the fairness pitcher is close to essential precisely because it makes the two non-negotiables, even strength and a clean stop, effortless. It is also cheap, simple, and has no mystical claims attached: it works by basic physics (mix, then serve). For value and real usefulness per pound spent, it is arguably the best buy in gongfu equipment, far more impactful than an expensive pot.

What you can use instead

The function matters more than the object: any small, heatproof jug that lets you decant the whole brew at once and serve evenly does the job. A dedicated glass or ceramic gong dao bei is pleasant and lets you

admire the liquor colour, but you do not need a costly one, and you can begin with any suitable small pitcher. This is the consistent line of this wiki's equipment pages: buy the function, not the prestige, and do not let "you need the proper one" stop you starting.

How to use and care for it

Pour the entire contents of the gaiwan or pot into the pitcher the moment the steep is done, then serve from the pitcher into the cups; do not leave brewed tea sitting on the leaves. Between infusions the pot is empty and the pitcher is empty, which is exactly the point. Care is trivial: rinse with water (no soap needed for glass or porcelain; treat unglazed clay pitchers like Yixing and avoid detergent), and dry it. There is essentially nothing to go wrong, which is part of its appeal. One practical note settles the commonest beginner question: a clear glass pitcher beats an opaque ceramic one, because being able to see the colour of the pooled infusion is half of why the vessel is useful for judging a brew. Buy clear and cheap before you buy beautiful.

Is it worth it

Unreservedly, if you brew gongfu style: it is inexpensive, free of mystique, and solves real extraction and consistency problems better than almost any other single item, more worth buying than a fancy teapot. It is unnecessary only if you brew exclusively one mug Western style. Get a simple one (or use a suitable jug), pour off completely into it every time, and enjoy one of the few pieces of tea kit that is pure, clear function.

The fairness pitcher, at a glance

Aspect	The read
What it is	Gong dao bei: a small jug you decant the brew into
What it solves	Even strength: no weak-then-bitter across cups
Why it works	Stops over-steeping by separating leaf from liquor
Substitute	Any small heatproof jug does the same job
Worth it?	Yes if you brew gongfu or share a pot; else optional

Reference noted

- Britannica: Pottery (ceramics and glaze)

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