Your First Gongfu Session: Cheap, Simple, Today

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Your first gongfu session, in summary:** Gongfu is a simple method, lots of leaf, little water, many short steeps, not a ceremony you must qualify for. You can do a first session today with a gaiwan, a cup and a re-steepable tea. Expect 6 to 12 distinct cups from one leaf.

Gongfu brewing is presented with enough ritual and equipment to scare beginners off, and the truth is that your first gongfu session can be done today, cheaply, with almost no kit, because gongfu is a simple method (lots of leaf, little water, many short steeps), not a ceremony you must qualify for. This page is the simple, minimal way in.

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

What gongfu actually is, in one line

Stripped of mystique: a high ratio of leaf to water, brewed in a small vessel, in many short, repeated infusions, tasting how the tea changes. Everything else, clay pots, trays, pitchers, etiquette, is optional refinement around that one idea. Holding that single sentence in mind is what makes a first session approachable rather than intimidating.

What you actually need (and do not)

You need: a small vessel you can pour from quickly (a gaiwan is traditional and cheap, but a small teapot or even a small heatproof bowl works), a cup, a way to catch the leaves when pouring, and a tea worth re-steeping. That is genuinely it for a first session. You do not need a Yixing pot, a fairness pitcher, a tea tray, a scale or a thermometer to begin; those are later conveniences (and the fairness pitcher is the first worthwhile add). Refusing to start until you own the full set is the main false barrier, and it is removable today.

The step-by-step first session

Pick a forgiving, re-steepable tea (a roasted oolong, a Tieguanyin, a Dian Hong or a shou pu-erh are all kind to beginners). Use a generous amount of leaf for the small vessel, far more than Western brewing, roughly 5g per 100ml. Warm the vessel and cups with hot water and tip it away. Give the leaves a quick 3 to 5 second rinse with hot water and discard it, noting the aroma the wet leaves give off. Then add water at the right temperature (around 95C for roasted oolong and pu-erh, 75 to 80C for green) and steep briefly, starting

around ten to twenty seconds. Pour off completely into the cup or a small jug, leaving no water on the leaves. Taste. Re-steep, adding a few seconds each round, and continue until the tea fades, often many infusions. That is a complete gongfu session; the skill is just tasting and adjusting.

What to ignore for now

For a first session, ignore: precise gram weights and timers (use your eyes and mouth; precision comes later), elaborate vessel-warming and rinsing rituals (a quick rinse of pu-erh or aged oolong is sensible, the rest is optional), the aroma cup and tea pet, special water mythology, and any sense that there is a single correct choreography you must perform. None of that is required to get the genuine core benefit, tasting a tea evolve across infusions, which is available on attempt one.

What to expect

Your first session may be slightly clumsy (over- or under-steeping a round); that is normal and is exactly how you learn the feel, not failure. The genuine, immediate reward is real even for a beginner: the same leaf giving distinctly different cups across infusions is obvious and enjoyable from the very first try, which is why gongfu is so rewarding to start. The first infusion is often most aromatic, the second and third the peak for depth, and by cup eight or ten a softer, sweeter cup that is still genuinely flavoured. It changes flavour and pleasure, not the tea's nature or health. Start simple, taste, adjust, and the refinements can come later if you want them.

Your first gongfu session, at a glance

Question	Answer
What is gongfu tea?	A Chinese tea-brewing style using small vessels, high leaf-to-water ratio, short repeated infusions and slow drinking.
What kit do I need?	A gaiwan (covered bowl) or small teapot, a small fairness pitcher (cha hai), 2-4 small cups, a drainage tray, kettle, scales. Total under £50.
What tea?	Whole-leaf Chinese tea. Best starting points: a roasted Wuyi oolong, a Tieguanyin, a sheng or shou pu-erh, or a high-quality Long Jing green.
What's the ratio?	About 1g of leaf per 15-25ml of water. So 5g in a 100ml gaiwan. Much stronger than Western brewing.
How long do I brew?	Very short. First infusion: 10-30 seconds (after rinsing). Subsequent infusions: 5-15 seconds, increasing slightly as the leaf gives less.
How many infusions?	Premium oolong and pu-erh: 6-12. Green tea: 3-5. Black tea: 4-6.
How long does a session take?	30-90 minutes for a full session. Not a quick brew; the slowness is part of the point.
Is it really that different from a normal cuppa?	Yes. Different ratio, different times, different vessels, different focus. The taste evolution across infusions is the point.

Reference noted

- Britannica: Tea (beverage)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Drink what you like, not what the shelf says you should. Curiosity is the only reliable guide.

More from the tea wiki

- Gongfu tea
- Gaiwan
- Fairness pitcher (cha hai)
- The tea tray (chaban)
- Yixing teapot care
- Oolong tea
- Pu-erh tea

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/