What Is Honeybush Tea? Rooibos's Sweeter Cousin

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Honeybush tea, in short:** What is honeybush tea? South African Cyclopia, naturally sweet rooibos cousin. Flavour, processing, sustainability, health claims realistic.

Honeybush is the lesser known South African cousin of rooibos: in brief, a caffeine free herbal infusion, naturally sweet and gentle, lovely as an everyday drink and, like rooibos, oversold as a superfood.

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

What it actually is

It is a tisane made from the Cyclopia plants of South Africa, related to and often compared with rooibos, with no tea leaf and no caffeine. The name comes from the honey like scent of its flowers. Like rooibos it is naturally caffeine free and low in the tannins that make some teas astringent, which makes it smooth and forgiving.

What it tastes like

Honeybush tastes warm, naturally sweet and mellow, often described as honeyed, slightly floral and a touch richer or rounder than rooibos, with no bitterness and a soft, comforting character. It is one of the gentlest, easiest drinking infusions there is, hard to brew badly.

The health picture

The picture mirrors rooibos: being caffeine free is a real, useful property for the evening and for caffeine avoiders; the low tannin smoothness is real; and it contains polyphenols like many plants, which does not make it a proven treatment. The "superfood" framing is the usual overreach: honeybush is a pleasant caffeine free drink, not a treatment. For ordinary drinking it is considered low risk, which is itself worth saying, with the usual sensible caution that concentrated extracts differ from a weak infusion.

How to use it well

Use it as the easy, gentle, caffeine free everyday and evening drink it is: brew it with boiling water and a generous, even long steep (it almost never turns bitter), and enjoy its natural honeyed sweetness without sugar. It is also a good caffeine free base for blends. Credit the real smooth, sweet, caffeine free pleasure;

ignore the superfood marketing, exactly as with its better known cousin rooibos.

How honeybush is processed

Traditional honeybush processing closely mirrors rooibos. Young branches with leaves and flowers are cut from the shrub by hand or with secateurs, usually in summer (December to March in South Africa). The harvest is then chopped or bruised to break the leaf cells and start oxidation.

The chopped material is piled, kept moist, and allowed to oxidise (ferment) for 24 to 36 hours. The colour changes from green to russet-brown and the sweetness develops. It is then spread out in the sun until fully dry, and the dried product is graded by leaf size and packed. An "unfermented" or "green" honeybush exists too, processed quickly to halt oxidation, but it is much less common; the traditional fermented version is what most people mean by honeybush tea.

The South African heritage

Honeybush was used by indigenous Khoekhoe and San peoples for centuries before European arrival, both as a beverage and in traditional medicine. After European settlement it gradually became a local Cape drink, documented by the botanist Carl Thunberg in the late 18th century. Mass commercial production began in the 20th century and accelerated after South Africa's political transition in the 1990s opened export markets.

The South African honeybush industry, associated with the South African Rooibos Council, coordinates production standards. Several wild harvested and estate grown varieties exist; the wild Cyclopia population is now sustainably managed, with some species endangered in the wild but reliably cultivated.

Honeybush tea at a glance

Question	Short answer
What is honeybush?	An herbal infusion from leaves and small stems of Cyclopia (genus of South African shrubs), close cousin to rooibos but with a sweeter, honey-like flavour.
Where does it grow?	The Cape Floristic Region of South Africa, mainly Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces. Wild and cultivated.
Caffeine?	None. Caffeine-free herbal infusion.
What does it taste like?	Naturally sweet, honey-like aromatic notes, mild caramel hints, low tannin, no bitterness. Easy-drinking and slightly more flavoured than plain rooibos.
How is it different from rooibos?	Same family broadly (Fabaceae), different genus. Honeybush is sweeter, more aromatic. Rooibos is plainer, slightly woody. Both are South African Fynbos plants.
Why does it smell like honey?	The Cyclopia flowers actually smell of honey (giving the plant its common name); the dried leaves retain some of this aromatic character.
Health claims?	Real but modest polyphenol content (mangiferin in particular). Marketed for menopause symptoms in some products; evidence is thin.
Cautions?	Generally very safe at culinary levels. No documented contraindications. Among the safest herbal infusions.

Reference noted

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Begin with the simplest honeybush idea on this page. Blends and extras can follow in week two.

More from the tea wiki

- Rooibos
- What is tulsi tea?
- What is moringa tea?
- What is guayusa?
- Chamomile tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine-free tea options

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/