

## 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.

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for What Is Honeybush Tea? Rooibos's Sweeter Cousin. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-honeybush-tea/>*

Honeybush is the lesser known South African cousin of rooibos, and the short answer is that it is a caffeine free herbal infusion, naturally sweet and gentle, genuinely lovely as an everyday drink and, like rooibos, oversold as an antioxidant superfood.

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

### What it actually is

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What it actually is , What Is Honeybush Tea? Rooibos's Sweeter Cousin. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-honeybush-tea/>*

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

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What it tastes like , What Is Honeybush Tea? Rooibos's Sweeter Cousin. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-honeybush-tea/>*

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

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The health picture , What Is Honeybush Tea? Rooibos's Sweeter Cousin. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-honeybush-tea/*

The health picture mirrors rooibos: caffeine free is a genuine, useful property for the evening and caffeine avoiders; low tannin smoothness is real; and it contains plant polyphenols like many plants, which does not make it a demonstrated remedy. The "antioxidant superfood" framing is the usual overreach, it 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

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for How to use it well , What Is Honeybush Tea? Rooibos's Sweeter Cousin. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-honeybush-tea/*

Use it as the easy, gentle, caffeine free everyday and evening drink it genuinely is: brew it with boiling water and a generous, even long steep (it is almost impossible to over bitter), and enjoy its natural honeyed sweetness without sugar. It is also a good caffeine free base for blends. Credit the genuine smooth, sweet, caffeine free pleasure; ignore the superfood marketing, exactly as with its better known cousin rooibos.

## How honeybush is processed

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for How honeybush is processed , What Is Honeybush Tea? Rooibos's Sweeter Cousin. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-honeybush-tea/*

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

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The South African heritage , What Is Honeybush Tea? Rooibos's Sweeter Cousin. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/what-is-honeybush-tea/*

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 genuinely endangered in the wild but reliably cultivated.

## Honeybush tea at a glance

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Question	Short answer
What is honeybush?	An herbal infusion from leaves and small stems of <i>Cyclopia</i> (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 ( <i>Fabaceae</i> ), 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 <i>Cyclopia</i> 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 antioxidant compounds (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](#)

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