Alcohol-free drinks that use tea for body

From the teas.co.uk wiki

The problem with most alcohol-free drinks is that they are sweet and nothing else. Alcohol brings warmth, bitterness and a certain weight; take it out and you are left with fruit juice unless you replace what it was doing.

Strong tea is the best replacement there is. Its tannins give a drink grip and a dry finish, and its bitterness stops the fruit taking over. That is why tea turns up in almost every decent no-alcohol drinks list.

The four parts of a good one

Part	What it does	Options
Body	Grip, dryness, backbone	Strong black tea, rooibos, hibiscus, cold-brewed green
Acid	Freshness, stops it cloying	Lemon, lime, grapefruit, a splash of vinegar shrub
Sweet	Balance, not sweetness for its own sake	Honey, maple, sugar syrup, ripe fruit
Length	Lift and volume	Sparkling water, tonic, ginger beer

Build it in that order, taste before the bubbles go in, and add the sparkling water last so it stays lively.

Three that work

Iced black tea with lemon and honey. Brew a strong black tea (double the usual leaf), cool it, and mix 100ml tea with 15ml lemon juice and 10ml honey syrup. Over ice, topped with soda. Dry, brisk and grown-up.

Rooibos and orange. Rooibos is sweet and smooth without sugar, and it keeps its body when it is cold. Try our rooibos mocktail spritz or strawberry rooibos spritz.

Hibiscus and ginger. Hibiscus brings tartness and a deep red colour; ginger beer brings heat. Brew the hibiscus strong, cool it, and mix half and half.

Getting the tea right

- **Brew it double strength**, because ice and mixers dilute it. Two bags where you would use one.
- **Cool it properly.** Brew, then chill; do not pour hot tea over ice and expect the same drink.
- **Do not over-brew for strength.** Longer brewing gives astringency, not depth. More leaf, not more time.
- **Cold brew if you want it smooth.** Overnight in the fridge gives a softer, less tannic base, good for green tea.

Serving matters more than you think

Use a proper glass, ice that is large and clear if you can, and a garnish you can smell. A drink that looks and smells like a cocktail tastes far more like one, which is most of the point for anyone who is not drinking.

Fizz, and keeping it

Sparkling water goes flat quickly once it is mixed, so add it at the last moment, and do not try to re-carbonate a mixed drink in a home carbonator: makers advise against putting anything but plain water in the bottle. SodaStream: flavoured drinks

Tea bases keep in the fridge for two days, covered. Make the base ahead, mix to order.

Common questions

Does the caffeine matter?

A strong black tea base carries real caffeine. Use rooibos or hibiscus for an evening drink.

Can I use tea bags rather than loose leaf?

Yes. Use twice as many as you would for a mug.

Will it taste bitter?

Some grip is the point; harshness is not. If it is harsh, you over-brewed rather than over-leafed.

What about alcohol-free spirits?

They work with tea, though they are expensive. A well-made tea base plus citrus does most of the job on its own.

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