Barley tea: mugicha, boricha and how to brew it

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Barley tea is roasted barley grain brewed in water. No tea leaves, no caffeine, and a taste that is toasty, grainy and faintly sweet, somewhere between popcorn and a crust of bread. In Japan it is **mugicha**, drunk ice-cold by the jug all summer; in Korea it is **boricha**, often served hot or cold in place of water at the table; in China you will meet it as damai cha.

It is the drink to reach for when you want something warm and comforting with no caffeine at all.

One important warning: it is not gluten-free

Barley is one of the cereals that contains gluten, so barley tea is not suitable for anyone with coeliac disease or a gluten intolerance. Straining the grain out does not change that: the gluten is in the liquid.

The NHS lists barley among the grains people with coeliac disease need to avoid. NHS: coeliac disease treatment

Caffeine-free and gluten-free are different questions, and barley tea answers only the first.

How to brew it

Bags (easiest): one bag per 500ml of freshly boiled water, 3 to 5 minutes. Many packs are sized for a jug rather than a mug, so check the pack before you use one bag per cup.

Loose roasted grain: 15g per litre. Either simmer for 5 minutes and strain, or steep in just-boiled water for 10 minutes.

Cold brew (the classic summer version): one bag or 15g of grain in a litre jug of cold water, in the fridge overnight, then strain. It is smoother and sweeter cold than hot, and it keeps for a couple of days covered in the fridge.

Barley tea is very forgiving: it does not turn bitter or astringent the way tea does if you leave it too long.

What to buy

- **Roasted barley**, plain, is the standard. ITO EN and Korean brands both sell it in bags and loose.
- **Corn and barley blends** are common in Korea, sweeter, rounder, and worth trying.
- **Check the pack volume**, not just the bag count: a 54-bag pack designed for 1-litre jugs makes a lot more than a 54-bag pack of mug-sized bags.

Barley tea, genmaicha and hojicha are all different

Drink	What is in it	Caffeine

Barley tea (mugicha)	Roasted barley grain only	None
Genmaicha	Green tea with toasted rice	Yes
Hojicha	Roasted green tea	Yes, a little

All three taste toasty; only one is caffeine-free.

Common questions

Does barley tea have caffeine?

No. There is no tea leaf in it.

Can children drink it?

It is a common family drink in Japan and Korea, caffeine-free and mild. As with anything, check the ingredients of the exact product.

Is it the same as barley water?

No. Barley water is made from unroasted pearl barley, often with lemon and sugar. Barley tea is roasted grain, unsweetened.

Why is mine bitter?

Usually too much grain, or a very dark roast. Use less, or switch to a cold brew.

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