Chicory: the caffeine-free coffee substitute

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Chicory is a root (the same plant family as the bitter leaves), dried, roasted and ground. Brewed, it makes a dark, bitter-sweet drink with caramel and burnt-sugar notes, and **no caffeine at all**. It has been drunk in Britain and France for centuries, in and alongside coffee, and it is the most convincing coffee substitute there is, precisely because it is bitter and dark rather than fruity or floral.

It is worth knowing about if you are cutting caffeine but miss the *shape* of a coffee: strong, dark, taken with milk.

The three products on the shelf

Product	What it is	Caffeine
Instant chicory	Chicory extract, dried into granules; stir into hot water	None
Roasted ground chicory	For brewing like coffee, in a pot or filter	None
Chicory and coffee blend	Both, in a stated ratio	Yes, from the coffee

That third one catches people out: a "chicory coffee" may be mostly chicory but still contain real coffee; one common French product lists 60% soluble chicory with 40% soluble coffee. If you need it caffeine-free, read the percentages.

Chicory versus tea

They solve different problems.

- **Chicory** replaces the roasted bitterness and the milky, after-dinner heft of coffee.
- **Tea** replaces the habit and the lift, and has its own caffeine unless you choose a herbal.
- For a caffeine-free drink that takes milk like tea, rooibos is the closer match; for a toasty caffeine-free drink, so is barley tea.

If you are moving off coffee, our tea for coffee drinkers guide covers the teas that hold up with milk.

How to brew it

Instant: 1 to 2 teaspoons per mug of hot (not boiling) water. Stir thoroughly: chicory granules clump. Add milk if you like; it takes it well.

Ground chicory: treat it like coffee. About 10g per 200ml in a cafetière, 4 minutes, pressed slowly. It is finer than most coffee grinds, so it can be muddy: use a paper filter if you want a cleaner cup.

Strength: chicory is more bitter than coffee at the same strength. Start weaker than you think.

Common questions

Does chicory taste like coffee?
Close, but sweeter and earthier, with less acidity and no roasted-bean aroma.

Is it caffeine-free?
Pure chicory is. Blends with coffee are not.

What should I expect from chicory?
It is a drink, not a supplement. Chicory root is high in inulin, a fermentable fibre, which can cause wind or discomfort for some people in quantity. This page makes no health claim.

Can I use it in a coffee machine?
Instant, no. Ground chicory can clog espresso machines; a cafetière or filter is safer unless the product says otherwise.

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