Chrysanthemum tea: what it is and how to brew it

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Chrysanthemum tea is an infusion of dried chrysanthemum flowers: no tea leaves at all, so no caffeine. The cup is pale gold, the smell is honeyed and floral, and the taste is gently sweet with a clean, slightly bitter finish. In China it is an everyday drink, often served with a lump of rock sugar, sometimes with goji berries, and it is the classic thing to order alongside a rich meal.

Chrysanthemum or jasmine? They are not the same thing

This is the confusion worth clearing up first.

	Chrysanthemum tea	Jasmine tea
What is in the cup	Dried flowers only	Green tea scented with jasmine blossom
Caffeine	None	Yes, from the tea leaves
Taste	Honey, hay, light bitterness	Green tea, with floral perfume
Flowers visible?	Yes, whole flower heads	Usually removed

If you want the flower flavour without caffeine, chrysanthemum is the one. If you want green tea that smells of flowers, that is jasmine.

What to buy

- **Whole flower heads** are the traditional form. They open dramatically in a glass and taste cleaner than chopped flowers.
- **Bagged chrysanthemum** is easier for a mug, and often blended with green tea or pu-erh: read the ingredients if you want it caffeine-free.
- **Sold as food.** Buy flowers packed for drinking, not florist's blooms or garden flowers: ornamental plants are grown for looks, not for eating, and may be treated with things you would not want in a cup. The RHS guide to edible flowers makes the same point about identification and provenance.

How to brew it

In a mug or glass: 4 to 6 dried flower heads (about 2g) in 250ml of water at around 90°C. Brew for 3 to 4 minutes. A glass is worth using: watching the flowers open is half the pleasure.

Refills: the same flowers will take a second and often a third infusion; add a minute each time.

Sweetening: a small piece of rock sugar or a little honey suits it. Taste it plain first: it is sweeter than people expect.

Do not boil it hard. A rolling boil pulls out more of the bitterness and flattens the perfume.

Ways to serve it

- **With goji berries:** a few dropped in the glass add a mild fruity sweetness.
- **With pu-erh:** the classic Cantonese restaurant combination, where the flowers lighten a dark, earthy tea.
- **Iced:** brew double strength, cool and pour over ice with a slice of lemon.
- **After a heavy meal:** it is light and clean, which is why it is the default in Chinese restaurants.

One caution

Chrysanthemum belongs to the daisy family. If you react to ragweed, marigolds, daisies or chamomile, you may react to chrysanthemum too, so try a small amount first and avoid it if you have a known allergy in that family.

Otherwise it is simply a flower infusion: enjoy it for the taste rather than for any health claim.

Common questions

Does chrysanthemum tea have caffeine?
Not if it is flowers only. Blends with green tea or pu-erh do.

Can I use flowers from my garden?
Better not to. Use flowers sold for drinking.

Why is mine bitter?
Too many flowers, water that was too hot, or too long a brew. Try 4 heads, 90°C and 3 minutes.

What is a good first flower tea to try if I can't find chrysanthemum?
Chamomile is the closest thing on most UK shelves: another caffeine-free flower infusion, softer and apple-scented. Our floral tea guide covers the family.

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