Dried citrus peel in tea: aroma without the acid

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Citrus juice and citrus peel do completely different jobs in a cup. Juice adds acidity and can curdle milk; peel adds perfume and almost no acid at all, because the aromatic oils live in the coloured outer layer of the skin. That is why dried peel works in a milky chai where a squeeze of orange would ruin it.

Zest, pith, peel: know which bit you want

- **Zest**: the thin coloured outer layer. This is where the oil glands are. Aroma lives here.
- **Pith**: the white layer underneath. Bitter, spongy, and the usual reason home-dried peel disappoints.
- **Peel**: both together, which is what you get if you peel carelessly.

Use a vegetable peeler or a sharp knife and take the colour, leaving the white behind. If your dried peel tastes harsh, too much pith is almost always why.

How to dry your own

1. **Choose unwaxed fruit** if you can, and scrub it well under running water. Wash all fresh produce before preparing it. FDA: selecting and serving produce safely
2. **Peel off strips of zest**, avoiding the pith.
3. **Dry it:** spread the strips on a rack somewhere warm and airy for two to three days until brittle, or in the oven at its lowest setting (around 60 to 70°C) with the door slightly ajar for two to three hours.
4. **Cool completely, then store** in an airtight jar in a dark cupboard. It keeps for months; if any piece is at all soft or shows mould, throw the batch away. Home drying guidance from UC Agriculture and Natural Resources covers the principles.

How much, and when to add it

Peel is strong. A little goes a long way, and too long in the pot turns it bitter.

Drink	Amount	When to add
Pot of black tea (500ml)	1 strip, about 4cm	With the leaves, 3 minutes
Chai in the pan (2 mugs)	1 to 2 strips	In the last 2 minutes of the simmer
Rooibos or herbal pot	1 to 2 strips	With the leaves, 5 minutes
Cold brew jug (1 litre)	2 to 3 strips	At the start, overnight in the fridge

For chai specifically: add the peel after the spices have simmered, and take it out before the milk goes in. That gives you the orange aroma through the whole cup without any risk to the milk. Our how to make chai at home guide has the base method, and chai spices covers the rest of the mix.

Chenpi: dried peel as a tea in its own right

In China, aged dried mandarin peel (**chenpi**) is a prized ingredient, sometimes aged for years and often brewed with pu-erh or on its own. Aged peel loses its sharpness and becomes deep and almost sweet. If you see small hard curls of dark peel sold at a surprising price, that is what they are.

What pairs well

- **Orange:** black tea, chai, rooibos, hibiscus blends.
- **Lemon:** green tea, ginger, mint.
- **Grapefruit:** oolong and white tea, used sparingly.
- **Mandarin:** pu-erh and other dark teas.

More on the fresh versions in citrus tea.

Common questions

Can I use peel from any orange?
Use fruit you would eat, washed well, and prefer unwaxed. Wax is not designed to be brewed.

Why is my peel bitter?
Too much white pith, or it was left in too long. Take the colour only, and remove it after a few minutes.

Can I dry peel in the microwave?
It is easy to scorch and the results are uneven. A low oven or air drying is more reliable.

Does dried peel add vitamin C?
Treat it as a flavour ingredient. Any vitamin content is small and largely lost in drying and brewing.

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