Orange blossom tea: flowers, blossom water and flavouring

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Orange blossom is the white flower of the bitter orange tree: the same blossom perfumers call neroli. Its smell is heady, sweet and slightly citrus, and it appears in tea in three quite different forms.

Form	What it is	How to use it
Dried orange blossom	Whole dried flowers, infused like any herb	1 teaspoon per 250ml, 90°C, 4 minutes
Orange blossom water	A distilled water, used in Middle Eastern and North African cooking	A few drops in a whole pot, added at the end
Orange blossom flavouring	A flavouring in a blended tea	Nothing to add; it is already in the bag

Dried flowers

The gentlest version. A teaspoon of dried blossom makes a pale, honeyed, caffeine-free infusion, and it takes well to a spoon of honey. It is also good mixed half and half with green tea or with mint.

Buy flowers sold for drinking. Orange blossom is a perfumery crop as well as a food one, so check the pack is food grade rather than craft or cosmetic material.

Orange blossom water: a seasoning, not an ingredient

This is where people come unstuck. Orange blossom water is distilled and concentrated: a teaspoon in a mug tastes like soap. Used properly, it is wonderful.

- **Start with 2 or 3 drops in a whole teapot**, stirred in after brewing.
- Add it **off the heat**. Boiling drives the aroma off.
- It suits mint tea, green tea and black tea with honey, a common touch in Moroccan and Levantine kitchens.
- Taste before adding more. You cannot take it out.

The same rule applies in the kitchen: a few drops in a fruit salad, a rice pudding or a syrup for baklava.

Flavoured blends

Plenty of blends carry orange blossom as a flavouring, sometimes with real citrus peel. Read the ingredient list to see which you are buying, and check the base if caffeine matters: an orange blossom green tea contains caffeine, a flower-only infusion does not. See what natural flavouring means.

Pairings worth trying

- **Mint and orange blossom:** two or three drops of blossom water in a pot of fresh mint tea.
- **Green tea and blossom:** a light Chinese green with a teaspoon of dried flowers.
- **Black tea, honey and blossom:** an afternoon pot, no milk.
- **Iced:** brew, cool, add a drop of blossom water and a slice of orange.

Our floral tea guide covers the other flowers, and citrus tea covers peel and juice.

Common questions

Is orange blossom tea the same as orange tea?
No. Orange tea is made from the fruit or peel; orange blossom is the flower, and it smells floral rather than fruity.

Does it contain caffeine?
Flowers alone, no. Blends with tea leaves, yes.

Why does mine taste like perfume?
Too much blossom water, or too many flowers. Halve it.

Can I use orange blossom essential oil instead?
No. Essential oils are not a food ingredient in this sense. Use culinary orange blossom water.

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