Red espresso: rooibos through an espresso machine

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Red espresso is rooibos ground as fine as coffee so it can be brewed in an espresso machine. You put it in the portafilter, pull a shot, and get a deep red, concentrated rooibos with a light crema. It behaves like espresso in a drink (red latte, red cappuccino, iced red americano), but it is naturally caffeine-free, because rooibos is not tea and not coffee.

The idea began in South Africa, where rooibos grows, and the original brand's brewing guidance is the usual starting point: about **14g of ground rooibos for a 60ml double shot, without tamping**. Red Espresso brewing guide

Why you cannot just use ordinary rooibos

An espresso machine forces hot water through a compacted bed of grounds at pressure. That only works if the particles are the right size and shape. Ordinary loose rooibos, or the contents of a tea bag, is far too coarse: the water rushes straight through, you get coloured water rather than a shot, and fine bits escape into the cup.

Ground rooibos sold for espresso machines is milled specifically for that job. That is the whole product.

Two other practical points:

- **Do not tamp it hard.** The maker's guidance is not to tamp; rooibos compacts differently from coffee and over-tamping chokes the shot.
- **Clean afterwards.** Rooibos stains and leaves fine red residue. Flush the group head and rinse the basket, or your next coffee tastes faintly of it.

Making a red latte without a machine

You do not need an espresso machine to get the same drink.

1. Brew **double-strength rooibos**: two bags, or 4g of loose rooibos, in 100ml of freshly boiled water for 5 minutes. Dragonfly Organic Pure Rooibos works well.
2. Steam or froth 150ml of milk, dairy or oat.
3. Pour the milk over the rooibos concentrate.
4. Sweeten if you like: a little honey suits it.

That is a red latte in three minutes, and rooibos is forgiving enough that a long, strong brew does not turn bitter.

Who it suits

- Anyone avoiding caffeine who misses the feel of a coffee shop drink.
- Households where one person drinks coffee and another does not: the same machine makes both.
- Evenings, when a flat white is out of the question.

Rooibos also takes milk naturally well, which is why it works in these drinks where most teas would not. More in our rooibos guide.

Common questions

Is red espresso actually espresso?
No. It borrows the brewing method and the format, not the coffee.

Does it contain caffeine?
No. Rooibos is naturally caffeine-free.

Will it damage my machine?
Used as intended, with a product ground for espresso machines, it is fine: clean it afterwards. Do not put ordinary loose tea in a portafilter.

Does it taste like coffee?
No. It tastes like a very concentrated rooibos: sweet, woody, smooth. The comparison is about the drink you build with it.

Can I use a moka pot or an Aeropress?
An Aeropress works well with double-strength rooibos and is much easier to clean. A moka pot is harder to control and clogs more easily.

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