# Shui Xian: the everyday Wuyi rock oolong

From the teas.co.uk wiki

If Rou Gui is the aromatic star of Wuyi rock tea, Shui Xian (??, "water sprite", sometimes written Shuixian or Narcissus) is the reliable everyday one. It gives a thick, smooth, woody cup with orchid and dried fruit behind the roast, and it is far more forgiving than most oolongs: brew it a bit too long and it stays drinkable rather than turning harsh.

It is also the rock tea you are most likely to be served in a Cantonese restaurant, and the best value way into the style.

## Where it sits

Shui Xian is a cultivar, not a place. It originated in Fujian and is grown widely, so you will meet it in several forms:

| Version | What it is |
|---|---|
| Wuyi Shui Xian | Grown and roasted in the Wuyi mountains: the classic rock tea |
| Zhangping Shui Xian | Pressed into small squares, lighter and more floral |
| Phoenix (Guangdong) Shui Xian | Related to Dan Cong teas, more aromatic |

Our rock tea guide covers the Wuyi context, and oolong roast levels explains what the charcoal work does.

## What "old bush" means

**Lao cong** (??) Shui Xian, "old bush", is tea from mature plants, often quoted as 50 years or more. Older bushes have deeper roots and smaller yields, and the tea is said to gain a distinctive mossy, woody depth.

It is a real thing and a real premium, and it is also unverifiable from a packet. There is no certification, and the term is used loosely. If a seller charges a lot for lao cong, ask who made it, where the bushes are and how old they are said to be. A straightforward answer is worth more than a romantic story.

## What to expect in the cup

- **Dry leaf:** long, dark, thick twists; smells of toast, wood and dried longan.
- **Liquor:** amber to deep orange.
- **Taste:** broad and rounded, more mouthfeel than perfume; orchid, bark, dried fruit, cocoa at heavier roasts.
- **Finish:** smooth, mineral, gently sweet.

Compared with Rou Gui, it is wider and mellower: less cinnamon sharpness, more body.

## How to brew it

**Gongfu style:** 5g per 100ml, boiling water, a quick rinse, then 15 to 20 seconds for the first infusion and a few seconds more each time. Six or more infusions is normal.

**Western style:** 3g per 200ml, boiling water, 2 to 3 minutes. This is the rock tea that survives a slightly careless brew.

Use water at a full boil. Roasted oolong needs the heat to open up. See how to brew oolong tea.

## Buying it well

- **Start with a mid-priced Wuyi Shui Xian.** It is the best introduction to rock tea flavour.
- **Ask about the roast date** and give a freshly roasted tea a month or two to settle.
- **Treat old-bush claims as a conversation**, not a guarantee.
- **Store it sealed and dry.** Roasted oolong keeps well for a year or more, unlike green tea.

## Common questions

**Does Shui Xian contain narcissus flowers?**
No. The name is a translation of the cultivar name; there are no flowers in it.

**Is it a good first rock tea?**
Yes. It is cheaper, more forgiving and gentler than most of the famous Wuyi teas.

**Is old bush worth the money?**
Sometimes, if you trust the seller. Drink a standard one first so you have something to compare it with.

**Can I re-roast or age it?**
Roasted oolong does age, and some drinkers keep it deliberately. That is a specialist habit; start by drinking it fresh.


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