Sobacha: roasted buckwheat tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Sobacha is roasted buckwheat groats brewed in hot water. It is nutty and toasty with a gentle natural sweetness, a little like a savoury version of popcorn, and it contains no tea leaf and no caffeine. In Japan it is a household drink; in Korea the same thing appears as memil-cha.

The bonus: **buckwheat is not wheat**, and not a cereal at all (it is a seed related to rhubarb), so sobacha is naturally gluten-free, which barley tea is not. Check the pack for shared-line warnings if that matters to you.

Two kinds you will see

Type	What it is	Taste
Common buckwheat	The everyday sobacha	Nutty, mellow, toasty
Tartary buckwheat (dattan)	A different species, darker roast	Stronger, more bitter-sweet, earthier

Tartary is often marketed with claims about rutin content. Buy it because you like the flavour; a nutrient headline about the raw seed tells you very little about your cup.

How to brew it

- **Loose groats:** 1 tablespoon (about 10g) per 300ml of freshly boiled water, 3 to 5 minutes. No need to strain hard: the grains sink.
- **Bags:** follow the pack; many are sized for a large mug.
- **A second use:** the brewed groats are edible. Sprinkle them over rice, salad or yoghurt for crunch, which is standard practice in Japan.
- **Iced:** brew double strength and pour over ice, or cold brew overnight in the fridge.

It does not go bitter with a long steep, which makes it a good tea for people who forget about the pot.

One real caution: buckwheat allergy

Buckwheat allergy is uncommon in Britain but well recognised in Japan and Korea, where buckwheat is eaten daily, and reactions can be serious. It is a named allergen on Japanese labelling. Japan Consumer Affairs Agency food allergy labelling (PDF)

If you know you react to buckwheat, sobacha is not a drink to experiment with. It is not one of the 14 allergens that must be emphasised on UK labels, so read the ingredients carefully and ask if you are unsure.

What it is not

- **Not barley tea.** That is mugicha, made from barley, and it contains gluten.
- **Not genmaicha.** That is green tea with toasted rice, and it contains caffeine.
- **Not soba noodles in a cup**, though they come from the same seed.

Common questions

Does sobacha contain caffeine?

No, if it is buckwheat alone. Blends with green tea do.

Is it gluten-free?

Buckwheat itself is. Check the packet for cross-contamination warnings if you have coeliac disease.

Can I eat the grains afterwards?

Yes, and they are good. Drain and scatter them over food.

Can I make it from the buckwheat in my cupboard?

Raw groats need toasting first: dry-fry them in a pan until golden and fragrant. Buckwheat flour will not work.

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