Why does tea taste metallic or musty in a flask?

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Nine times out of ten it is **not the steel**: it is the lid. Modern vacuum flasks are lined with stainless steel that is essentially inert; the parts that hold flavour are the silicone seal, the plastic threads, the drinking spout and any straw. Tea oils and tannins settle there, dry out, and go stale.

The other usual suspects are a flask that has been shut away damp, and tea left standing on its leaves for hours.

Find the cause in one test

Do this over two days and you will know exactly where the taste comes from.

1. **Night one:** fill the clean flask with plain cold drinking water, close it, leave it overnight, then taste the water in the morning.
   - **Tastes odd** ? the flask or its lid is the problem. Go to cleaning.
   - **Tastes fine** ? go to step 2.
2. **Next brew:** make a mug of tea and a flask of the same tea at the same time, and taste both after an hour.
   - **Flask tastes worse** ? it is how the tea is being kept: leaves left in, or the flask was not pre-warmed.
   - **Both taste the same** ? it is your tea or your water, not the flask. See tea in hard water.

How to clean a flask properly

Most people wash the body and rinse the lid. It is the wrong way round.

Every time: rinse both, and leave them apart to dry: lid off, upside down. Damp, sealed flasks are how musty smells start.

Weekly, or when the taste turns:

1. **Take the lid apart** as far as it will go: unscrew the spout, pull out the silicone gasket, remove any straw.
2. **Wash each piece** in hot soapy water with a small brush. The gasket groove is where the residue hides.
3. **For stains and smells**, soak the body and parts in a solution of **one tablespoon of bicarbonate of soda per 500ml of hot water** for a few hours or overnight, then rinse well.
4. **For mineral scale**, a rinse with a weak white vinegar solution, followed by a thorough rinse.
5. **Dry everything separately** before reassembling.

Flask makers give the same advice (hand wash, disassemble the lid, dry fully) and warn against dishwashers and bleach on vacuum bodies unless the product specifically allows it. Thermos: cleaning a stainless steel bottle · KINTO: stainless steel tumbler care

Do not use abrasive scourers on the inside (they scratch the lining), or leave tea sitting in the flask for days.

Silicone infusers that smell

Silicone absorbs aromas, which is why a silicone infuser used for fruit or spiced tea can carry that smell for weeks.

- Soak in the bicarbonate solution above, overnight.
- Boil it for a few minutes in fresh water, if the maker allows.
- Dry it in daylight on a windowsill.
- If it still smells after that, replace it: silicone is cheap, and a stainless basket does the same job without holding odours.

Our tea infusers guide covers the types.

Preventing it in the first place

- **Take the leaves or bag out before you fill the flask.** Standing on leaves is the biggest single cause of stewed, harsh flask tea.
- **Pre-warm the flask** with boiling water for two minutes, then tip it out.
- **Fill it to the top.** Air in the flask means faster cooling and more oxidation.
- **Empty and rinse it the day you use it**, not the morning after.
- **Store it with the lid off.**

Full method in how to make tea in a flask.

Common questions

Is a metallic taste dangerous?
An unpleasant taste from residue or a damp lid is not a safety issue, but a flask with a scratched or damaged interior should be replaced.

Can I put my flask in the dishwasher?
Only if the maker says so. Many vacuum bodies should not go in.

Why does my flask smell of soup?
Because something savoury lived in it. Strip the lid and use the bicarbonate soak; if the smell persists, keep that flask for soup and buy another for tea.

Does milk make it worse?
Yes. Milky tea in a warm flask sours faster and leaves more residue. Carry milk separately and add it in the cup.

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