

Wakoucha: Japanese black tea

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

Japan is famous for green tea, but it makes black tea too — **wakoucha** (???), literally "Japanese black tea", grown and processed in Japan rather than imported. It is a small category, largely made by individual farms, and it has a distinct character: soft, gently sweet, and much less astringent than the black teas Britain is used to.

Why it tastes so different from Assam

Two reasons.

The plants. Most Japanese tea comes from *Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis*, the small-leaf variety used for green tea, rather than the large-leaf assamica variety behind strong Indian black teas. That alone gives a lighter, sweeter cup. Some Japanese farms use cultivars bred for black tea, such as benifuuki, which give more body.

The habit. Japanese makers come from a green-tea tradition, so wakoucha is generally made to be drunk without milk, with gentler oxidation and a lighter hand than a breakfast blend.

Expect: light amber colour, aromas of honey, ripe apple or sweet potato, a round mouthfeel and a finish that does not dry your tongue. It is a black tea for people who find black tea harsh.

How to brew it

Do not use your sencha routine — it is a black tea and it needs more heat than green tea.

- **Leaf:** 3g per 200ml.
- **Water:** 90–95°C.
- **Time:** 2 to 3 minutes for the first infusion.
- **Milk:** try it plain first. Most wakoucha is too delicate for milk, though a full-bodied benifuuki can take a splash.
- **Again:** good wakoucha will give a decent second infusion.

Buying it

- **Look for the region and the farm.** Kyushu, Shizuoka and Gifu all produce it, often at small scale.
- **Look for the cultivar** if it is given — benifuuki, benihikari and yabukita all behave differently.
- **Expect a price closer to speciality tea** than to supermarket black tea. This is small-batch production.

- **Check the year.** It is at its best fresh, like the rest of Japanese tea.

Our [Japanese tea map](#) covers the wider family, and [black tea by origin](#) puts wakoucha next to the world's other black teas.

Common questions

Is wakoucha the same as hojicha?

No. Hojicha is a roasted green tea. Wakoucha is a true black tea, fully oxidised.

Does it take milk?

Usually better without. Try it plain, then decide.

Is it expensive?

Compared with everyday black tea, yes: production is small and mostly artisanal.

Does "Japanese" on the packet mean it was grown in Japan?

Not necessarily — a Japanese company can blend imported tea. If origin matters, look for the farm or region.

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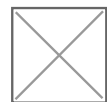
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