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 to 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 real 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 in craft batches.

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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