What "natural flavouring" means on a tea label

From the teas.co.uk wiki

"Natural flavouring" is an ingredient in its own right (a flavouring made from natural source material) and it is **not** the same thing as having fruit in the bag. A tea can smell intensely of raspberry and contain no raspberry at all.

That is not a scandal; flavoured tea is a legitimate, long-established product. But it explains why so many fruit teas smell wonderful and taste of very little: aroma is doing the work.

The wording tells you more than you think

Retained EU flavouring law (Regulation 1334/2008) sets out how flavourings can be described, and the exact phrasing matters. Article 16 on legislation.gov.uk

What the label says	What it means
Natural strawberry flavouring	At least 95% of the flavouring component comes from strawberry
Natural strawberry flavouring with other natural flavourings	Strawberry is recognisable, but other natural flavourings make up more of the mix
Natural flavouring	A natural flavouring, with no single named source promised
Flavouring	Not restricted to natural sources
Strawberry pieces	Actual fruit, declared as an ingredient in its own right

The 95% applies to the flavouring, not to the tea bag. If a blend contains 0.5% flavouring, then 95% of that 0.5% came from strawberry. It says nothing about how much fruit is in the bag, which is usually none.

The picture on the box is not the recipe

Packaging shows what a tea is meant to taste like. The ingredients list shows what is in it. When they disagree, believe the list.

A "pear and white tea" might be:

- white tea with dried pear pieces,
- white tea with natural pear flavouring,
- or white tea with apple pieces and pear flavouring: apple being the cheap, sturdy fruit that gives fruit blends their bulk.

All three are legal, and all three taste different. If you want actual fruit, look for the fruit named in the ingredients with a percentage beside it.

Percentages: where they appear and what they mean

Where a fruit is emphasised on the label, its quantity usually has to be declared in the ingredients: that is the "(10%)" you sometimes see. Ingredients are also listed in descending order by weight, so the first two or three are most of the bag.

A useful habit: read the first three ingredients, then look for the fruit you were promised on the front. In many fruit teas the top of the list is apple, hibiscus and rosehip, whatever the box is called.

Does flavoured tea taste worse?

No, it depends on the blend and your preference. Flavouring gives consistency and intensity; real fruit pieces give body, natural sweetness and a rounder taste, but they fade faster and cost more.

- **Want aroma?** Flavoured blends deliver it.
- **Want fruit taste and body?** Look for a high percentage of actual fruit pieces.
- **Want no flavouring at all?** Buy plain tea and add fresh fruit yourself.

More about what is usually in the bag in fruit tea explained, and about scenting versus flavouring in scented vs flavoured tea.

Common questions

Is natural flavouring made from the fruit?
It is made from natural source material, which may or may not be the fruit named. Only the "natural X flavouring" wording ties it to a named source.

Is "natural" healthier than "flavouring"?
It tells you about the source of the flavouring, not about nutrition.

Why do fruit teas smell sweeter than they taste?
Because aroma carries fruit and there is no sugar in the cup. See why fruit tea smells sweeter than it tastes.

Do allergens have to be declared in flavourings?
Yes. Any of the 14 regulated allergens used must be declared, however it enters the product. See allergens in tea.

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