Teapots and Infusers

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Short version:** Brown Betty for British black, gaiwan for Chinese tea, Yixing for pu-erh, mesh basket for single mugs.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in May 2026.

The right teapot or infuser doesn't transform your tea, but it does affect both cup quality and the daily ritual of brewing. The British tea equipment landscape ranges from the simple basket infuser at £3 to elaborate Yixing clay teapots at £200+; understanding the options helps you choose equipment that suits your daily practice without overspending. The good news is that excellent tea brewing requires very basic equipment; the elaborate options are for enthusiasts and specific tea family applications rather than essential daily use.

The basic equipment ladder

Tea brewing equipment can be organised by complexity and price:

Tier 1: Minimum (£0 to £10):

- Tea bags directly in cups (no equipment needed)
- Basic basket style mesh infuser for a mug
- Tea ball infuser (the small ball and chain design)
- Fine mesh strainer for pouring loose leaf brewed in a pot

Tier 2: Practical (£15 to £50):

- Standard British teapot (1 to 1.5 litre capacity, ceramic or glass)
- Single cup teapot with built in infuser
- French press dedicated to tea use
- Quality basket infuser with deep mesh

Tier 3: Enthusiast (£50 to £150):

- Premium ceramic or porcelain teapot with quality mesh strainer
- Cast iron Japanese style teapot (tetsubin)

- Glass gaiwan (Chinese lidded brewing bowl)
- Temperature control electric kettle

Tier 4: Specialist (£150+):

- Yixing clay teapot for specific tea family use
- Premium porcelain gongfu sets
- Specialty matcha equipment (chasen, chawan, chashaku)
- Dedicated tea station setup with multiple specialist pieces

For most British drinkers, Tier 1 or Tier 2 equipment handles all everyday tea brewing. The higher tiers are for serious enthusiasts or specific tea family practices (matcha ceremony, gongfu pu erh brewing, etc.).

The classic British teapot

The standard British teapot (1 to 1.5 litre capacity, ceramic or glass) is the foundational tea brewing equipment for British households. Key characteristics:

- **Capacity** 1 to 1.5 litres typically; serves 4 to 6 cups per pot
- **Material:** ceramic, porcelain, or borosilicate glass; all work well for black tea
- **Spout design:** important for clean pouring without dribbling
- **Lid design:** ideally with a built in mesh strainer in the spout, or used with a separate strainer
- **Heat retention:** ceramic and porcelain hold heat better than glass; warming the pot before brewing helps maintain temperature

For drinkers brewing British black tea daily for multiple drinkers, a quality ceramic teapot is the practical core equipment. £20 to £40 buys an excellent everyday teapot that lasts decades.

The single cup brewer

For solo drinkers or those wanting flexibility, single cup brewing equipment provides convenience:

Basket style infuser in a mug:

- Most flexible option; works for any tea family
- Quality stainless steel mesh provides good filtration without leaf escape
- £5 to £15 for decent quality
- Fits most standard mugs

Tea ball infuser:

- Traditional but somewhat limited; the small enclosed space restricts leaf expansion
- Adequate for everyday black tea but not optimal for whole leaf premium teas
- £3 to £10

Single cup teapot with built in infuser:

- Combines pot and cup function in one piece
- Allows full leaf expansion for whole leaf tea
- £15 to £30 for quality versions
- Particularly suited for solo drinkers wanting better than mug brewing

French press for tea:

- Provides full leaf room and easy straining
- Works well for most tea families except very fine teas (which can clog the mesh)
- Often doubles up for coffee brewing
- £15 to £40 for decent quality

For solo daily tea drinkers, a quality basket infuser plus a favourite mug handles 95 percent of practical tea drinking at minimal cost. For drinkers wanting better experience, a single cup teapot with built in infuser provides slight upgrade.

Specialty brewing equipment

For specific tea family applications:

Yixing clay teapot:

- Traditional Chinese unglazed clay teapots from Yixing region
- The clay absorbs flavour over time; teapots become "seasoned" to specific tea families
- Used for oolong and pu erh primarily; one teapot per tea family is the traditional approach
- £50 to £500+ depending on quality and craftsmanship
- For serious tea enthusiasts; not necessary for casual drinking

Glass gaiwan:

- Chinese lidded brewing bowl, traditional gongfu style brewing
- Allows visual appreciation of leaves during brewing
- Perfect for multi infusion teas (pu erh, oolong, premium green)
- £15 to £40 for quality glass versions
- Ideal for drinkers exploring premium Chinese tea

Cast iron Japanese teapot (tetsubin):

- Traditional Japanese cast iron, often with enamel interior
- Excellent heat retention
- Can be heated directly on a stove for sustained warm tea
- £40 to £150 for quality versions
- Aesthetic appeal alongside functional brewing

Matcha equipment:

- Chasen (bamboo whisk), £15 to £40 for quality versions
- Chawan (matcha bowl), £20 to £100+
- Chashaku (bamboo scoop), £5 to £20
- Required for traditional matcha preparation; see the matcha overview

Temperature control kettles

One specific piece of equipment worth covering: temperature control electric kettles:

- **Set specific target temperatures:** typically in 5°C increments from 60°C to 100°C
- **Maintain target temperature:** holding water at the right temperature for delicate teas
- **Particularly useful for green tea and matcha** where 70 to 80°C is essential
- **£40 to £100 for quality versions:** brands include Smeg, KitchenAid, Sage, various others

For drinkers brewing green tea, white tea, or matcha daily, a temperature control kettle is one of the higher quality lifestyle upgrades available. For drinkers who only brew black tea or herbal infusions (where boiling water is appropriate), a standard kettle works fine. See the water temperatures guide.

Material considerations

Teapot and infuser materials affect cup quality and longevity:

- **Ceramic and porcelain:** traditional, neutral flavour, good heat retention; the British standard
- **Glass:** neutral flavour, less heat retention, allows visual appreciation of brewing; particularly good for green and white tea
- **Cast iron:** excellent heat retention, can be enamel lined to prevent rust; traditional Japanese style
- **Yixing clay:** unglazed; absorbs flavour over time; specifically for oolong and pu erh
- **Stainless steel** used for infusers and some kettles; neutral and durable
- **Plastic** can absorb and impart flavours; generally avoided for serious tea brewing

For everyday tea drinking, ceramic, porcelain, glass, or stainless steel are all excellent choices. Plastic infusers and pots are best avoided for premium tea where flavour purity matters.

Cleaning tea equipment

Proper cleaning extends equipment life and preserves cup quality:

- **Rinse with hot water after each use:** removes most tea residue without soap
- **Avoid soap on Yixing clay or seasoned cast iron:** the absorbed flavour layer is part of the brewing character
- **Use mild soap for ceramic, porcelain, glass, and stainless steel** when more cleaning is needed

- **Descale periodically:** particularly in hard water areas; vinegar or commercial descaler removes mineral buildup
- **Air dry thoroughly:** prevents mould or mildew in damp storage
- **Avoid dishwasher for delicate items:** premium teapots and matcha bowls should be hand washed

Practical equipment recommendations by drinker type

Specific recommendations for different drinking patterns:

Casual daily drinker (1 to 3 cups daily):

- Quality basket infuser for mugs (£10)
- Standard kettle (£20 to £40)
- Total cost: £30 to £50

Regular tea drinker (4 to 6 cups daily, mostly black tea):

- Quality ceramic teapot (£25 to £40)
- Fine mesh strainer (£5)
- Standard kettle (£20 to £40)
- Storage tins (£15)
- Total cost: £65 to £100

Tea enthusiast (varied tea families, premium brewing):

- Temperature control kettle (£60 to £100)
- Quality teapot (£30 to £60)
- Glass gaiwan for Chinese tea (£20)
- Matcha equipment if matcha drinker (£40 to £80)
- Quality storage tins (£25)
- Total cost: £175 to £285

Serious enthusiast (gongfu brewing, specialty teas):

- Temperature control kettle (£60 to £100)
- Yixing clay teapot for oolong/pu erh (£100+)
- Quality porcelain teapot for other teas (£60+)
- Glass gaiwan plus tea pitcher and cups (£60+)
- Premium matcha equipment (£100+)
- Specialty storage solutions (£50+)
- Total cost: £400+

What we stock

Browse the full black tea range, green tea range, and broader catalogue. The most bought daily teas suit the equipment recommendations above:

- True English Tea (T.E.T) Everyday English No 1, 20 Tea Bags 40g
- True English Tea (T.E.T) Everyday Green Tea, 20 Tea Bags 35g
- Dalgety Strong Lemon & Ginger Herbal, 18 Tea Bags 54g
- Tetley Seriously Refreshing, 75 Tea Bags 250g
- Yorkshire Tea Caramelised Biscuit Brew, 40 Tea Bags 112g
- Yorkshire Tea Cherry Bakewell Brew, 40 Tea Bags 112g

For comparisons across the wider tea landscape, see also: Yorkshire Tea, Teapigs, Twinings, Pukka.

The verdict

Tea equipment is one of the more overcomplicated areas of tea drinking. The marketing around premium teapots and elaborate brewing equipment creates impression that good tea requires expensive gear; the reality is that excellent tea brewing requires very basic equipment, and the elaborate options are for enthusiasts with specific interests rather than essential daily use.

For most British drinkers, a basic basket infuser, a standard kettle, and decent storage tins handles 95 percent of practical tea drinking excellently. The specialist equipment (Yixing clay, gongfu sets, premium matcha equipment) is for drinkers with specific interests in particular tea families; for general daily drinking, basic equipment is genuinely sufficient.

The exception worth considering is a temperature control kettle for drinkers who specifically brew green tea, white tea, or matcha daily; the precision is meaningful for these temperature sensitive teas, and the cost is modest relative to the cup quality improvement. Beyond that, expensive equipment is optional; cheap proper equipment delivers excellent everyday tea.

Don't let equipment complexity discourage tea exploration. Good tea is the priority; equipment supports the practice but doesn't make or break it. Start with basic equipment that works, upgrade specific pieces if and when your interests develop in particular directions.

For the fuller context see the loose leaf brewing guide, the water temperatures guide, the tea storage guide, the matcha overview, the pu erh overview, the oolong overview, and the British tea culture overview.

What to buy

For most of British tea drinking, a Brown Betty teapot in a 6-cup size handles English Breakfast, Earl Grey and any blended black with no fuss; add a stainless mesh basket infuser for single mugs. For Chinese tea, a 110ml porcelain gaiwan is the best £15 on the journey, and a small glass teapot lets you watch flowering teas open. Remember the teapot is the cheapest upgrade in tea; the leaf inside it is what costs money over time, so a £20 pot brewing good loose leaf out-delivers any teabag setup.

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teas · Match the tea to the moment. A 6am cup and a 4pm cup do not need to be the same brew.

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