How to Make Masala Chai: Authentic Recipe

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **The real chai method:** Authentic masala chai is brewed, not syrup: simmer strong Assam with whole cardamom, ginger, cloves and cinnamon in milk and water.

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

Proper masala chai is brewed by simmering whole spices and tea leaves in a 50:50 mix of water and milk, with sugar added near the end. The whole spice approach is non negotiable: ground spices in pre mixed chai blends produce a thinner, less complex cup. The exact spice ratio is regional and personal, but the canonical British "masala chai" is built on cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, and black peppercorns over a strong Assam black tea base. Cooked properly, the whole house smells like a Mumbai street stall, and the cup tastes like nothing you'll get from a tea bag in a mug.

This guide covers the proper recipe, the spice ratios, and the picks on our shelf for chai that actually works.

The basic recipe (serves 2)

Ingredient	Quantity	Note
Black tea (Assam loose leaf or strong tea bags)	2 heaped teaspoons (or 2 strong tea bags)	Strong base; Assam is traditional, Yorkshire works
Water	250ml	Half the total liquid
Whole milk	250ml	Other half; semi skimmed works, oat milk fine for vegan
Green cardamom pods	4 to 6, lightly crushed	The most important spice; do not skip
Fresh ginger	1cm piece, grated or sliced	Or 1/2 tsp dried ginger powder
Cinnamon stick	1 small piece (about 5cm)	True Ceylon cinnamon or cassia, both work
Whole cloves	2 to 4	More than 4 makes the cup overpowering
Black peppercorns	2 to 4	The "secret" spice; adds warmth without obvious pepper taste
Sugar (or jaggery)	2 to 3 teaspoons	To taste; jaggery is traditional
Optional: star anise	1/2 piece	Adds depth, particularly with cardamom

Ingredient	Quantity	Note
Optional: fennel seeds	1/4 tsp	Common in Gujarati style chai

The method

1. **Lightly crush the cardamom pods** with the back of a knife or a pestle to release the seeds and oils. Don't grind to dust; just split the pod.
2. **Combine water and all the spices** (cardamom, ginger, cinnamon, cloves, peppercorns, optional extras) in a small saucepan over medium heat.
3. **Bring to a boil** and let simmer for 4 to 5 minutes. The water should turn a tan colour and smell strongly of the spices. This step (the masala extraction) is where the flavour is built.
4. **Add the tea** (loose leaf or open tea bags into the pot). Simmer for another 2 to 3 minutes until the colour deepens.
5. **Add the milk and sugar.** Stir, bring back to a boil, and let it foam up to the rim of the pan, then pull it off the heat just before it boils over. Repeat this "raise to foam" step 2 to 3 times for the proper street stall texture.
6. **Strain into mugs** through a fine sieve. The strained spices are usually discarded; some traditions reuse them for a second weaker brew.
7. **Serve immediately, very hot.** Chai is a hot drink experience; lukewarm chai loses much of the warming spice character.

The shortcut version (single mug, 5 minutes)

For a quick weekday cup without the saucepan ritual:

1. Put a strong chai tea bag (Twinings Dark Chai, Yogi Classic Chai, etc.) in a mug.
2. Add 100ml boiling water. Let steep 3 minutes.
3. Heat 150ml whole milk on the hob or in a milk frother until just below boiling.
4. Squeeze the bag, remove, add the hot milk, and sweeten to taste.

This isn't proper masala chai but it's a sensible weekday substitute. The full recipe is for evenings, weekends, and when guests are over.

The chai latte vs proper chai distinction

British coffee shops sell "chai latte" which is usually:

- A pre mixed chai concentrate or syrup poured into hot milk
- Significantly sweeter than traditional chai
- Thinner spice character because the spices were extracted at a factory weeks or months earlier

It's a different drink, often labelled the same. If you've only had high street chai latte, the home brewed proper version will surprise you. See the chai vs chai latte guide for the deeper comparison.

Variations across India

- **Punjabi chai:** heavier on cardamom and clove, less ginger, often boiled hard for several minutes after milk addition.
- **Gujarati chai:** includes fennel seeds, slightly less spicy, sweeter.
- **Kashmiri pink chai (noon chai):** a different drink entirely, made with green tea, salt, and bicarbonate of soda; pink colour from baking soda alkalinity.
- **South Indian "irani chai":** sweeter, made with khoya (reduced milk), often paired with savoury Hyderabadi street food.
- **Bombay cutting chai:** the "half cup" served at street stalls; strong, sweet, hot, drunk fast.

What we stock for proper chai

Browse the chai teas collection, the spiced teas collection, and the black teas collection for the full chai relevant range.

For pre blended chai bags (the convenient daily option)

- Twinings Dark Chai 40 Bags, the British shelf's most recognised chai; reasonably authentic with Assam black + cardamom + ginger + cinnamon + cloves
- Yogi Classic Chai 17 Bags, a full spice blend; Yogi's flagship
- Yogi Bombay Chai 17 Bags, sweeter, vanilla cinnamon leaning
- Pukka Organic Vanilla Chai 20 Bags, vanilla led on a rooibos base; caffeine free chai option

For loose leaf chai (better for the saucepan method recipe)

- Twinings Chai Loose Leaf 100g, the loose leaf version of the bagged classic

For strong Assam black tea base (build your own from scratch)

- Twinings Pure Assam 50 Bags, the malty, strong base proper masala chai needs
- Teapigs Assam 50 Bags, premium Assam in pyramid temples

For caffeine free chai (rooibos base, evening cups)

- Pukka Vanilla Chai 20 Bags, rooibos based, caffeine free
- Yogi Rooibos Chai 17 Bags, rooibos chai with the spice canon

Clear caveats

- **Chai means tea.** "Chai tea" is technically redundant; it's "tea tea". Authentic Indian chai is just "chai" or "masala chai" if you want to specify spiced.
- **The sugar is part of the recipe.** Unsweetened masala chai is fine but tastes thin. The traditional cup expects 2 to 3 teaspoons per mug; reduce gradually if you're cutting sugar.

- **Black peppercorns aren't optional.** Skipping them is one of the most common mistakes home cooks make. The pepper rounds the spice profile and adds the warming "kick" without obvious pepper taste.
- **Pregnancy:** chai made with black tea contains caffeine, so count your cup towards the NHS pregnancy limit of 200mg across the day, from every source.
- **Chai for blood sugar:** the cinnamon and ginger have positive effects on glucose; the sugar undoes most of it. Drink unsweetened or very lightly sweetened for the metabolic benefit.

Related reading: the chai tea overview, the chai vs chai latte, the Assam tea overview, the best tea for after meals (chai is a spiced after dinner blend), the best tea for winter, and the best tea for after dinner.

Related wiki: how a chai latte differs from masala chai

Related wiki: Ceylon tea benefits

Proper chai versus a chai latte

The single most useful distinction on this page is the one between proper masala chai and a chai latte. Proper chai is brewed: strong black tea, usually Assam, simmered with whole spices, milk and water and sweetened in the pot, so the spice is extracted and the tea is the backbone. A chai latte, especially the cafe kind, is usually a sweet spiced syrup or powder added to steamed milk, where the tea is faint and the sugar is high. Neither is wrong, but they are different drinks, and knowing which you are making is most of getting it right. The authentic method rewards whole spices (cardamom, ginger, cloves, cinnamon, pepper) bruised and simmered rather than ground powder stirred in, and a real black tea base rather than a teabag, because the long simmer would stew a delicate tea into bitterness.

Regional variation is the rule, not the exception, more ginger in the north, more cardamom in Gujarat, pepper and spice heavier in the south, so the recipe here is a sound default to adjust to taste rather than a single correct formula. The sweetening is integral to the style rather than an afterthought, but it is still a choice you control. Held that way, a brewed, spice-led, milk-and-tea drink you balance to your own palate, masala chai is one of the most rewarding things to make at home, and the wider masala chai and chai guides cover the background. Buy a strong Assam base, a ready chai blend, the wider tea range, or the full tea shop.

Reference

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

Day-to-day teas that sit alongside this one: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Browse the full tea range; orders over £35 ship free to UK addresses.

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teas · Pick what you'll actually drink every day. A pan of chai you actually make is worth more

than a spice tin you admire.

More related guides

- Twinings Dark Chai
- How to Make Kombucha From Tea (Careful Beginner Guide)
- Iranian Tea (Chai): The Method Is the Culture
- How to Make a Hot Toddy

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