Green Tea: Processing and Brewing Guide

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Green tea, in summary:** Green tea is Camellia sinensis processed to halt oxidation early: fresh, lower-caffeine, brew-sensitive. The two traditions, the processing, and how to brew it well.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team on 8 August 2026.

Green tea is the unoxidised version of the same plant that gives us black tea, *Camellia sinensis*. The leaves are picked, briefly heated to stop oxidation (steamed in Japan, pan fired in China), then rolled and dried. The result is a green, light-bodied cup with vegetal and grassy character. Green tea contains caffeine, and the amount can overlap with black tea depending on the leaf, dose and brew.

Green tea encompasses major Chinese and Japanese traditions and now occupies a familiar place on British shelves. Processing and regional style are more useful to a shopper than unsupported global consumption rankings.

Japanese vs Chinese green tea, the two big traditions

Almost every green tea on the British shelf comes from one of two traditions, and the difference is in the kill green step right after harvest:

- **Japanese green tea** is steamed. The cup is greener (literally), brighter, more vegetal, and often slightly umami because the steaming preserves more amino acids. Sencha is the standard everyday Japanese green; matcha is the powdered shade grown ceremonial form; genmaicha adds toasted brown rice for a nutty character.
- **Chinese green tea** is pan fired in a hot wok. The cup is yellower, often slightly toasty or chestnut like, and lower in umami. Gunpowder (the rolled pellet style used in Moroccan mint tea), Mao Feng, and Long Jing (Dragonwell) are the classics.

You'll find both styles on the UK supermarket and specialist shelf. Most flavoured greens (Tetley Green with Lemon, Twinings Salted Caramel Green, Lipton Pure Nature Green) use a Chinese style base because it carries flavouring well; the higher grade plain greens we stock from Pukka and Teapigs lean Japanese.

How green tea is processed

Four steps, each shorter than for black tea:

1. **Pick** the youngest leaves and buds, traditionally the first two leaves and a bud.
2. **Kill the green:** immediately, steaming for Japanese style or pan firing for Chinese style. This deactivates the enzymes that would otherwise oxidise the leaf into black tea.
3. **Roll** the leaves to bruise the cell walls and release flavour compounds. Different styles roll into different shapes (needles, balls, pellets).
4. **Dry** to lock in the chemistry and bring moisture down to about 3 percent.

The whole process takes hours rather than days, and crucially does NOT include oxidation. That single difference is what separates green tea from oolong (partially oxidised) and black (fully oxidised).

How to brew green tea (the most important rule)

A common reason green tea tastes harsh is water that is too hot for the particular leaf. Very hot water can extract bitterness and astringency quickly and mask the sweeter, softer parts of the cup.

Aim for 70 to 80°C, never boiling. The full family by family detail is in the water temperatures guide; the headline:

- **Temperature:** 70 to 80°C. Wait 60 to 90 seconds after the kettle clicks off before you pour.
- **Steep:** 1 to 2 minutes for a clean cup; 3 minutes maximum if you want it stronger. Past 3 minutes you're extracting bitterness, not flavour.
- **Leaf:** One bag per mug; loose leaf at 1g per 50ml of water (one rounded teaspoon per mug).
- **Milk:** No. Milk overwhelms the delicate cup. Drink it black, optionally with a slice of lemon.
- **Re infusions:** Most decent loose leaf greens give you a second cup that's noticeably different from the first. Add 30 seconds to the second steep.

For the full brewing technique with loose leaf, see the loose leaf brewing guide. The single biggest cup improvement most British drinkers can make is the temperature drop, see also common brewing mistakes.

Caffeine in green tea

Green tea and matcha both contain caffeine, but a dependable amount cannot be inferred from the family name alone. Leaf dose, serving size, cultivar and preparation all matter; matcha is consumed as suspended leaf rather than a strained infusion.

Green tea contains caffeine and L-theanine. Individual responses vary, so their presence does not guarantee a particular feel in the cup or a steady, jitter free day.

For decaf green tea options, see the decaf British teas guide and the ultimate caffeine guide. Decaffeinated green tea is lower in caffeine rather than necessarily caffeine-free. Pure herbal infusions do not contain tea leaf, but always check blends for added tea, yerba mate or other caffeinated ingredients.

A note on health

Green tea has been studied more than almost any other drink, and the findings are less dramatic than the marketing. It is a low-calorie, lightly caffeinated cup with a high polyphenol content (including EGCG, a catechin), and that is the real appeal. The claims about shedding weight and flushing toxins outrun the evidence; there is at most a small effect from the caffeine, not the magic bullet the supplement aisle implies.

Drink green tea because you enjoy it. It is a pleasant daily habit rather than a medicine.

What we stock

Browse the full green tea and matcha range. The most bought lines on teas.co.uk:

- True English Tea (T.E.T) Everyday Green Tea, 20 Tea Bags 35g
- San Benedetto Matcha Green Tea, 400ml
- True English Tea (T.E.T) British Mix Collection, 30 Tea Bags 57.5g
- Dilmah Ceylon Pure Green Loose Leaf Tea, 100g
- Teapigs Mao Feng Green Tea, 15 Tea Bags 37.5g
- Lipton Pure Nature Green, 30 Tea Bags 39g

Green tea vs the other tea families

Same plant, different processing, very different cup. The quick comparison:

Family	Oxidation	Caffeine	Cup colour	Takes milk
Green tea	None	Varies by leaf and brew	Pale gold to green	No
Black tea	Full	Varies by leaf and brew	Amber to mahogany	Yes
White tea	Minimal	Varies by leaf and brew	Very pale gold	No
Oolong tea	Partial	Varies by leaf and brew	Honey to copper	No
Rooibos (not actually tea)	n/a	None	Red brown	Optional

Brands worth knowing in the green tea space: Teapigs for premium Japanese leaning whole leaf, Pukka for organic blends, Dragonfly for Soil Association certified organic, Twinings for the mainstream flavoured range.

For the deeper how to, see the loose leaf brewing guide and the steeping times guide. For the broader tea family map, see the black tea overview.

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