Matcha: How It Is Made and Prepared

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Matcha, in summary:** Matcha is shade-grown, stone-ground whole-leaf green tea with more catechins and a distinctive relaxed but alert caffeine-and-L-theanine effect; also the most counterfeited tea on the shelf, so know what good looks like.

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

Matcha is finely ground green tea powder. Same plant as any other green tea, *Camellia sinensis*, but production parts ways with leaf green tea about three weeks before harvest, and the result is a drink with several times the catechins, a distinctive caffeine plus L theanine effect, and a place in Japanese culture that goes back 800 years. It is the only tea in the world where you consume the whole leaf, not just an infusion.

Matcha has gone from a niche speciality product on the British shelf in the early 2000s to a mainstream supermarket presence by 2026. The growth has been driven by three things: the visible vivid green cup that photographs well, the smooth, focused energy from the L theanine balance, and the matcha latte as a non coffee café default. It's also the most counterfeited tea on the market, so knowing what good matcha looks like matters.

Where matcha came from

Matcha arrived in 12th century Japan with Buddhist monks returning from Song dynasty China. The stone grinding technique was adapted from Chinese practice and then developed separately in Japan. By the 16th century matcha sat at the centre of the tea ceremony, chanoyu, formalised by the tea master Sen no Rikyu. After 1900 machinery made shading and grinding possible at a larger scale, and the superfood wave of the 2010s took it worldwide.

How matcha is made

The production process is what makes matcha matcha. Three details separate it from leaf form green tea:

1. **Shade growing:** the last 3 weeks before harvest the tea bushes are covered with bamboo or shade cloth, blocking 70 to 90 percent of sunlight. The plant responds by producing more chlorophyll (deeper green) and more L theanine (the sweet, savoury amino acid behind its focused feel).
2. **Hand picking** only the youngest, most tender leaves of the spring flush. Higher grades hand select bud and two leaves; lower grades take broader plucks.

3. **Steaming and stone grinding:** the leaves are briefly steamed, 10 to 30 seconds, to halt oxidation, then dried *flat* rather than rolled into needles the way sencha is. The flat dried leaf is called tencha, and tencha is what matcha is made from: it is de stemmed, de veined, and slowly stone ground into a powder so fine it flows like talc.

Stone grinding is the slow step. A traditional granite mill produces about 30g of ceremonial matcha per hour. Even with modern equipment, real ceremonial grade matcha is expensive to produce, which is why a 30g tin of high grade matcha costs £20 to £40 while a 100g bag of decent loose leaf green tea costs £8.

Ceremonial vs culinary matcha

Two grades dominate the British shelf, and they're for very different uses:

	Ceremonial grade	Culinary grade
Use	Drinking, whisked traditionally with water	Lattes, baking, smoothies, cooking
Colour	Vivid bright green, almost neon	Duller olive green
Taste	Smooth, slightly sweet, vegetable umami, no bitterness	More astringent, grassier, bitter notes that disappear when blended with milk and sugar
Price (per 30g)	£20 to £50	£8 to £15
Source	Spring harvest, hand picked, stone ground	Later harvests, machine picked, machine ground

The simple rule: if you're drinking it neat (with hot water and a whisk), you want ceremonial grade. If you're putting it in a milky latte, smoothie, or cake, culinary grade is fine and considerably cheaper. Don't waste ceremonial matcha in a latte, the milk and sugar mask the flavour you paid for.

There is a third tier between the two that British sellers label premium or barista grade, roughly £15 to £25 per 30g. It is drinkable neat if you don't mind a firmer edge, and it is the sensible choice for lattes if you want the matcha to come through the milk. One buying rule is worth memorising: anything under £10 per 30g sold as "ceremonial" is almost certainly mislabelled culinary.

How to make matcha properly

Matcha is not steeped, it's whisked. The powder is suspended in hot water rather than infused from a leaf, which is why you consume the whole tea rather than the infusion. The traditional Japanese kit is a chasen (bamboo whisk), a chawan (wide bowl), and a chashaku (bamboo scoop), but a small whisk and any bowl work fine for everyday use.

1. **Sift 1 to 2g of matcha** (1/2 to 1 teaspoon) into the bowl. Sifting is non optional; matcha lumps if you skip it.
2. **Add 60 to 80ml of water at 70 to 80°C** NOT boiling. Boiling water cooks the matcha and turns the cup bitter. See the water temperatures guide for the family by family detail.

3. **Whisk vigorously in a "M" or "W" pattern:** for 30 to 60 seconds until a thick foam forms on top. Speed matters more than pattern; the goal is a layer of fine bubbles across the surface.
4. **Drink immediately.** Within 2 minutes the matcha settles and the foam breaks down. This is a now or never drink.

A common British shelf shortcut is to use a battery milk frother instead of a chasen. It's slightly less aerated than a proper bamboo whisk but for everyday brews it does the job.

The method above is **usucha**, thin matcha, which is what almost everyone drinks daily. The ceremonial preparation is **koicha**, thick matcha: two to three times the powder into 30 to 40ml of water, whisked slowly rather than briskly until it is the consistency of syrup with no foam, then sipped two or three times. Koicha only works with good ceremonial grade; anything less turns bitter at that concentration.

Matcha latte at home

The most popular use of matcha in the UK is the latte. The proper version:

1. Sift 1 to 2g of culinary grade matcha into a glass.
2. Add 30ml of water at 75°C and whisk into a smooth slurry, no lumps.
3. Heat 200ml of milk (oat works particularly well, almond is too thin, dairy is rich and traditional).
4. Pour the milk over the matcha slurry. Stir, top with foam if you've frothed the milk.
5. Sweeten with a teaspoon of honey, maple syrup, or sugar if you want; some people drink it neat.

Iced matcha latte: same recipe but use cold milk and ice cubes. Actually one of the most refreshing drinks on a summer day, and the visual layer of bright green matcha against white milk is half the appeal.

Caffeine in matcha (the L theanine difference)

Matcha caffeine is high for a green tea, around 60 to 70mg per cup, comparable to a black tea or about half a brewed coffee. The reason is simple: you're consuming the whole leaf, not just the infusion. A standard cup of green tea (which only extracts what dissolves) sits at 20 to 35mg.

What makes matcha different from coffee at the same caffeine level is the L theanine content. Shade grown tea is unusually high in L theanine, an amino acid that crosses the blood brain barrier and modulates the caffeine effect. Regular matcha drinkers describe the result as relaxed rather than jittery, and there's reasonable scientific evidence behind that claim: in EEG studies, L theanine plus caffeine produces measurably different effects on the brain than caffeine alone.

The practical effect for most drinkers: matcha gives you the morning energy of a coffee without the post coffee crash or anxiety. For more on the caffeine context across all tea families, see the ultimate caffeine guide.

Matcha vs leaf form green tea

Same plant, different processing, very different drink:

	Matcha	Leaf form green tea

What you drink	The whole leaf, suspended	The infusion only, leaf discarded
Caffeine	60 to 70mg per cup	20 to 35mg per cup
Antioxidants	Up to 137x more EGCG than steeped green tea	Standard green tea catechin levels
L theanine	Very high (shade grown)	Moderate
Cup colour	Bright vivid green	Pale gold to green
Brewing time	30 to 60 seconds whisking	1 to 3 minutes steeping
Cost per cup	£0.30 to £0.80	£0.05 to £0.30

How to spot good matcha

The matcha quality scam is rampant. Lower grade matcha sold at premium prices is everywhere on the British shelf, and checking colour, smell and taste is the only way to tell.

- **Colour:** real ceremonial matcha is a vivid, almost neon green. Yellow green or olive green matcha is older, lower grade, or both.
- **Origin** Japan (Uji, Nishio, Kyoto) is the gold standard. Chinese matcha is often acceptable for culinary use but rarely matches Japanese quality at ceremonial grade. Be sceptical of unmarked origin matcha.
- **Taste** real matcha is slightly sweet with a savoury umami undertone and minimal bitterness. Sharply bitter or fish pond grassy matcha is poor quality.
- **Sift test:** ceremonial matcha sifts cleanly with no clumps; culinary matcha clumps slightly.
- **Foaming:** real ceremonial matcha foams up to a thick top layer with 30 seconds of whisking. Poor matcha barely foams.

Storing matcha

Matcha is the most fragile tea on the shelf. Ground leaf has nowhere to hide from air, light and warmth, so it fades fast: drink a tin within 4 to 6 weeks of opening if you want the vivid green and the umami. Keep it in an airtight tin, in the fridge once opened, and in a cool dark cupboard while it is still sealed. An old tin is the usual reason a matcha fails the colour and foam checks above, rather than the grade on the label.

A note on health

Matcha has been studied more than most green tea preparations. The most interesting finding is L theanine plus caffeine, which does seem to give a smoother, steadier lift than caffeine alone. Beyond that the true picture is modest: a nutrient dense, low calorie drink with small effects, not a treatment for anything.

Claims such as matcha speeding up calorie burning by 40 percent are typical supplement industry exaggeration. Drink matcha because you like it; the traditional uses are real but not magic.

What we stock

Browse the matcha range. The most bought matcha related products on teas.co.uk:

- San Benedetto Matcha Green Tea, 400ml
- Twinings Matcha, 20 Tea Bags 40g
- Loyd Matcha Japanese Green Tea Powder, 40g
- Perfect Ted Ceremonial Grade Matcha, 30g
- Perfect Ted Strawberry Matcha, 75g
- Perfect Ted Vanilla Bean Matcha, 75g

If you want loose powder ceremonial grade matcha for traditional whisking, that's typically not on the British supermarket shelf, look at specialist Japanese tea importers. We add ceremonial grade tins when supply allows.

For the wider tea family map see the green tea overview, the black tea overview, and the white tea overview. For the brewing fundamentals across all families, the loose leaf brewing guide. For the caffeine context the full caffeine guide. For the wider Japanese tradition see the Japanese tea tradition, for the amino acid behind the steady focus the L-theanine wiki, for steeping leaf form green tea the how to brew green tea guide, and for the family comparison green tea vs other types.

Studies cited

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

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Matcha looks dear, so work it out per bowl. Larger tins usually come out ahead, though supermarket sachets occasionally do.

More related guides

- Iced Matcha: Whisk Cool, Build Over Ice
- How to Make Matcha Properly: The 60 Second Method

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