# Matcha vs Green Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Matcha vs green tea:** Matcha vs green tea: stone ground whole leaf vs steeped leaf, caffeine, catechins and preparation. UK independent tea guide.

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

**Matcha and green tea come from the same plant (*Camellia sinensis*) but produce dramatically different drinks.** The processing diverges sharply about three weeks before harvest, with shade growing, hand picking, de stemming, and stone grinding turning matcha into the only tea in the world where you consume the whole leaf rather than just an infusion. The result is several times the catechin load, double the caffeine of standard green tea, a much higher L theanine concentration, and a price tag to match.

This guide covers the actual differences between matcha and leaf form green tea, what each is best for, and how to pick between them for any given use case.

## The headline differences

| | Matcha | Green tea (leaf) |
|---|---|---|
| Plant | Camellia sinensis (shade grown) | Camellia sinensis (sun grown) |
| What you drink | The whole leaf, suspended in water | The infusion only, leaf discarded |
| Form | Bright green powder | Loose leaf or tea bags |
| Brewing | Whisked with 70 to 80°C water for 30 to 60 seconds | Steeped at 70 to 80°C for 1 to 3 minutes |
| Caffeine per cup | 60 to 70mg | 20 to 35mg |
| L theanine | Very high (shade grown) | Moderate |
| Antioxidants (EGCG) | Up to 137x more than steeped green tea | Standard green tea load |
| Cup colour | Vivid bright green, almost neon | Pale gold to green |
| Cost per cup | £0.30 to £0.80 | £0.05 to £0.30 |
| Equipment needed | Whisk (chasen), bowl, sifter | Tea bag or basic infuser |

## The shade growing difference

The defining production difference. For the last 3 weeks before harvest, matcha tea bushes are covered with bamboo or shade cloth that blocks 70 to 90 percent of sunlight. The plant responds in two important ways:

- **More chlorophyll:** producing the deeper green colour that distinguishes matcha visually
- **More L theanine:** the amino acid responsible for matcha's distinctive sweet savoury umami flavour and the famous "relaxed focus" effect

Standard green tea is sun grown throughout, producing more catechin variation but less L theanine concentration. The shade growing step is what makes matcha matcha at the agricultural level; everything downstream (processing, grinding, ceremony) builds on that foundation.

### The whole leaf difference

Why matcha carries several times the catechins of leaf green tea: you're consuming the whole leaf, not just what dissolves in hot water. A standard cup of steeped green tea extracts somewhere between 30 and 50 percent of the leaf's soluble compounds; the rest stays in the discarded leaf. With matcha, the entire leaf (minus stems and veins) goes into the cup as suspended powder.

This is why matcha caffeine is roughly double standard green tea (more total caffeine present) and why matcha EGCG levels can be dramatically higher per cup. It's also why matcha quality matters so much: any pesticide residue, any oxidation damage, any grinding contamination ends up in the cup directly rather than being filtered out.

For more on the matcha production process and quality grades see the matcha overview; for the wider green tea family map see the green tea overview.

### Caffeine and the L theanine difference

Both matcha and green tea contain the caffeine plus L theanine combination that produces tea's distinctive "steady focus" alertness, but the ratios and absolute amounts differ:

- **Matcha** 60 to 70mg caffeine plus very high L theanine. The result is sustained focus over 4 to 6 hours with a smooth taper. Most matcha drinkers describe it as the cleanest energy source they've used.
- **Standard green tea** 20 to 35mg caffeine plus moderate L theanine. A lighter lift suited to afternoon use without sleep impact, but doesn't deliver the same sustained focus as a matcha bowl.

For a strong morning lift with sustained concentration, matcha is the more efficient choice. For a gentle afternoon pick me up that won't affect evening sleep, green tea is the better fit. See the ultimate caffeine guide for the family by family caffeine map.

### Brewing comparison

The brewing methods are fundamentally different.

**Matcha** is whisked, not steeped. The traditional method:

1. Sift 1 to 2g (1/2 to 1 teaspoon) of matcha into a wide bowl
2. Add 60 to 80ml of water at 70 to 80°C, never boiling

3. Whisk vigorously with a chasen (bamboo whisk) in an "M" or "W" pattern for 30 to 60 seconds
4. Drink immediately while the foam is intact

**Green tea** is steeped:

1. Place 1 teaspoon of loose leaves or 1 tea bag in a cup
2. Add 200ml of water at 70 to 80°C, never boiling
3. Steep for 1 to 3 minutes depending on tea style
4. Remove leaves or bag, drink hot

The water temperature matters equally for both: boiling water destroys the delicate amino acids that make either drink work properly. See the water temperatures guide for the full family by family detail.

## Cost comparison

Matcha is dramatically more expensive than green tea on a per cup basis. The reasons are real:

- Shade growing requires extra labour and equipment
- Hand picking is slower and more selective than mass mechanical harvesting
- Stone grinding produces approximately 30g of ceremonial matcha per hour even with traditional Japanese mills
- The whole leaf format means more raw material per cup

A 30g tin of decent ceremonial grade matcha costs £20 to £40 and produces 15 to 30 cups, working out to £0.70 to £1.50 per cup. A 100g bag of decent loose leaf green tea costs £8 to £15 and produces 30 to 50 cups, working out to £0.15 to £0.30 per cup. For everyday drinking green tea is several times cheaper; for matcha itself, the cost is simply the cost.

## When to use matcha

- **Morning energy with sustained focus:** the cleanest tea based equivalent to a strong coffee
- **The traditional ceremonial preparation** when you want the slow pleasure of whisking your own bowl
- **Smoothies, lattes, and baking** where the bright colour and bold flavour are part of the appeal (use culinary grade, not ceremonial)
- **Pre workout:** the high caffeine plus L theanine combination is well suited to focused training
- **Maximum antioxidant intake:** the per cup EGCG load is dramatically higher than steeped green tea

## When to use green tea

- **Afternoon pick me up:** lower caffeine fits between morning coffee and evening sleep
- **Multiple cups across the day:** the lower per cup intensity supports drinking 4 to 6 cups without overdosing
- **Cost conscious daily green tea habit:** matcha would be unaffordable; green tea fits any budget

- **Brewing without specialist equipment:** just hot water and a tea bag or simple infuser
- **Wanting the variety of styles:** dragonwell, sencha, jasmine, gunpowder, hojicha, and the rest of the green tea world that matcha doesn't include
- **Pairing with food:** the lighter character works alongside a meal where matcha's intensity might overwhelm

## What we stock

Browse the matcha range and green tea range. The most bought versions of each:

**Matcha**

- 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

**Green tea**

- 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

Brand level archives: Pukka, Twinings, Teapigs, Clipper.

## The verdict

Matcha and green tea are not direct substitutes; they're two different uses of the same plant. Matcha is the high intensity drink, ceremonial or functional, for a sustained lift and the most catechins per cup, accepting the higher cost and kit it needs. Green tea is the everyday flexibility drink that fits any budget and any time of day, with a wider variety of styles to explore.

For most drinkers the right answer is "both, for different occasions": matcha as the morning or pre workout focus drink (a few times a week), green tea as the afternoon everyday cup (most days). Treating them as either or misses what each does best.

*For the wider context see the matcha overview, the green tea overview, the green tea vs black tea comparison, the water temperatures guide, and the full caffeine guide.*

One last plain note on judging matcha against green tea fairly: the most reliable test is free, so ignore the name, the heritage story and the price on the tin, and judge each on what it delivers in the cup against the job it was made for. A dependable everyday brew judged by connoisseur standards will always look poor, and a connoisseur tea judged as an everyday workhorse will always look overpriced, and almost every unfair verdict in tea comes from applying the wrong yardstick rather than from the product itself. Matched to the job it does best, brewed or paired correctly, and stripped of both marketing inflation and inverted snobbery, the product can be enjoyed for exactly what it actually is, which is the consistent, eyes open

standard this whole wiki applies to everything it covers.

### Studies cited

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

Easy picks alongside this one: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Have a wander through the tea range; above £35, matcha and green tea ship free to UK addresses.

**FROM THE CURATOR**

*teas* · A single carefully whisked bowl is worth more than five exotic bags drunk on the run.

### More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
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