Earl Grey vs Lady Grey

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Earl vs Lady, in summary:** Earl Grey vs Lady Grey: bergamot intensity, citrus peel additions, the lighter Twinings. UK independent tea guide. Free UK delivery £35+, free sample.

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

Earl Grey and Lady Grey are both Twinings originated bergamot black teas, but Lady Grey is the lighter, more citrus forward, more delicate cousin to Earl Grey's bolder bergamot character. The base black tea is similar in both; the difference is in the flavouring approach (Earl Grey uses bergamot oil only, Lady Grey adds Seville orange and lemon peel) and the resulting cup intensity. Lady Grey is essentially Twinings' "Earl Grey for people who find Earl Grey a bit much".

This guide covers the actual differences in flavouring, cup character, brewing approach, and which one suits which drinker.

The headline differences

	Earl Grey	Lady Grey
Base tea	Black tea (typically Ceylon or Chinese keemun blend)	Black tea (similar base, often slightly lighter)
Primary flavouring	Bergamot oil	Bergamot oil + Seville orange peel + lemon peel
Bergamot intensity	Strong, defining the cup	Lighter, balanced with citrus peels
Cup character	Bold, citrus perfumed, distinctive	Delicate, citrus forward, refreshing
Originated by	Various 19th century blenders, Earl Grey association c.1830s	Twinings, 1990s
Trademark	Generic style, multiple brands	Twinings registered trademark
Best with milk	Mixed opinions, lemon traditional	No milk, lemon optional
Caffeine per cup	40 to 60mg	40 to 60mg

The bergamot question

Both teas are defined by bergamot oil. Bergamot is a small citrus fruit (*Citrus bergamia*) grown primarily in the Calabria region of southern Italy; the oil pressed from its rind has a distinctive perfumed citrus aroma that's used extensively in perfumery (Earl Grey is essentially "tea with perfume in it" in mechanical terms) and in flavouring.

Earl Grey delivers bergamot at full intensity. Quality Earl Grey uses real bergamot oil rather than synthetic flavouring, and the cup smells noticeably perfumed before you take a sip. The bergamot dominates the flavour profile: the underlying black tea is the canvas, the bergamot is the painting.

Lady Grey delivers bergamot at lower intensity, balanced with the citrus peels. The result is a more rounded citrus character where the bergamot is one note among several rather than the dominant feature. The cup is less perfumed and more "just citrus tea".

For the wider Earl Grey context including the various Lord Grey, Russian Earl Grey, and London Fog variants, see the Earl Grey overview.

The Twinings origin story

Lady Grey is a Twinings invention from the early 1990s, created specifically for the North American market where Earl Grey was found to be too bergamot heavy for many drinkers. The name was chosen as a clear partner to Earl Grey, with a positioning that suggested a more delicate, more accessible version of the same idea.

Lady Grey is a Twinings registered trademark, which means you'll only find it under the Twinings brand. Other brands sell similar bergamot plus citrus blends under different names (often "Earl Grey Citrus", "Citrus Earl Grey", or "Bergamot Citrus"), which produce comparable cups but can't use the Lady Grey name.

Earl Grey, by contrast, is a generic style name and is sold by virtually every tea brand on the British shelf. Twinings didn't invent Earl Grey (the historical attribution to the 2nd Earl Grey is contested) but they were one of the first major brands to commercialise it, and Twinings Earl Grey remains one of the benchmark versions.

The flavour difference

Brew Earl Grey and Lady Grey side by side and the differences are immediately clear from the aroma alone, before any tasting:

Earl Grey smells perfumed and rich. The bergamot dominates; the underlying tea provides body without competing for attention. The cup tastes of bergamot first and tea second, with a long perfumed finish that lingers. It's the more assertive, more defined drink.

Lady Grey smells brighter and lighter. The combination of bergamot, orange peel, and lemon peel produces a more citrus fruit character without the heavy perfumed note. The cup tastes of citrus and tea in roughly equal measure, with a cleaner, lighter finish. It's the more refreshing, more easygoing drink.

Drinkers who love Earl Grey often find Lady Grey "thin" or "watered down"; drinkers who find Earl Grey "too perfumey" often find Lady Grey "just right". Neither response is wrong; they're different drinks for different palates.

Milk or no milk

One of the most debated questions in the Earl Grey world. The traditional British approach is Earl Grey with a slice of lemon and no milk; the American and northern European approach often includes milk (the "London Fog" being Earl Grey with steamed milk and vanilla). Both work; neither is wrong; the choice is personal.

Lady Grey is traditionally served without milk, with the citrus peels providing enough character to make milk feel out of place. A slice of lemon or lime can complement the existing citrus notes, but most Lady Grey drinkers serve it neat.

For Earl Grey specifically:

- **Without milk:** the bergamot dominates and the tea presents at full perfumed intensity
- **With lemon:** the citrus echoes the bergamot and creates a brighter, more acidic cup
- **With milk:** the bergamot mellows significantly and the cup becomes more "tea with a hint of bergamot" rather than "bergamot tea"

Brewing comparison

Both teas use the same standard black tea brewing approach:

1. **Water at just off the boil** (95 to 100°C). Both teas use sturdy black tea bases that handle near boiling water without bitterness.
2. **Steep for 3 to 4 minutes**. Slightly shorter than English Breakfast because the citrus oils can become slightly harsh with extended brewing.
3. **Remove the bag or strain the leaves**. Don't leave them in; oversteeping makes the bergamot taste bitter and the citrus astringent.
4. **Serve neat or with optional lemon**. Milk is optional for Earl Grey, generally avoided for Lady Grey.

For brewing temperatures family by family, see the water temperatures guide.

Caffeine content

Both teas have roughly the same caffeine content (40 to 60mg per cup, similar to standard black tea) since the underlying tea base is similar. Earl Grey can sometimes deliver slightly more if brewed strong; Lady Grey tends to be brewed slightly milder. Either is suitable for morning, mid morning, or early afternoon drinking; both should be avoided in the late afternoon if you're sleep sensitive.

Decaf versions of both exist (Twinings Decaf Earl Grey is widely available; Lady Grey decaf is less common but appears occasionally) for evening drinking.

Which one for which drinker?

- **Loves bold, perfumed citrus tea** Earl Grey
- **Wants a lighter, more refreshing citrus tea** Lady Grey
- **New to bergamot teas** Lady Grey is the gentler entry point
- **Drinks tea with milk by default** Earl Grey works with milk; Lady Grey doesn't pair as well

- **Drinks tea black with lemon:** both work; Earl Grey is the more traditional choice
- **Wants a slightly different afternoon tea from morning English Breakfast:** either works as a flavour change
- **Specifically wants Twinings** only Twinings sells Lady Grey under that name
- **Wants brand variety** Earl Grey is available from every brand, Lady Grey only from Twinings

What we stock

Browse the Earl Grey range and the broader black tea range. The most bought versions of each:

Earl Grey

- True English Tea (T.E.T) British Mix Collection, 30 Tea Bags 57.5g
- Lipton Black Earl Grey With Italian Bergamot, 20 Tea Bags 32g
- Tetley Earl Grey, 50 Tea Bags 125g
- Teapigs Darjeeling Earl Grey, 15 Tea Bags 37.5g

Lady Grey

- Twinings Lady Grey, 80 Tea Bags 200g

Brand level archives: Twinings brand profile, Teapigs, Clipper.

The verdict

Earl Grey is the standard, more assertive bergamot tea that's been a British staple for nearly two centuries. Lady Grey is a 1990s Twinings invention designed as a lighter, more accessible version of the same idea, with bergamot dialled down and citrus peels added for balance.

If you've never tried Lady Grey, it's a worthwhile experiment, especially if you find Earl Grey occasionally too perfumed or too heavy. If you're a committed Earl Grey drinker who loves the perfumed character, Lady Grey will probably feel like a downgrade rather than an alternative. The two coexist in the Twinings range precisely because they appeal to different palates.

For the wider context see the Earl Grey overview, the black tea overview, the English Breakfast vs Irish Breakfast comparison, the water temperatures guide, and the ultimate caffeine guide.

Reference

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

Adjacent teas that pair with this article: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Browse the full tea range; once the basket tops £35, UK delivery is on us.

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teas · Whichever Grey you choose, compare it by cost per cup. Loose leaf Greys often win on that, with bags close behind.

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