PG Tips: History, Blends and Tea Bags

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **PG Tips, in brief:** PG Tips is one of the two dominant British black tea brands, Brooke Bond 1930, Kenya-led CTC blend, pyramid bag, chimps adverts; for.

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

PG Tips is one of the most recognised British tea brands in history, founded in 1930 and synonymous with the morning cup for millions of UK households across multiple generations. The brand built its market dominance through the post war decades on the back of memorable advertising (the chimps adverts from 1956 to 2002 are landmark British advertising), the introduction of the pyramid bag in 1996, and a Kenya led blending approach that produces the distinctive brisk, bright, slightly sharper cup that defines the PG style. The brand has faced more turbulence than competitors in the last decade through ownership changes and brand resets, but PG Tips remains a top three British tea brand by volume.

This guide is a deep dive into PG Tips: the history, the Kenyan tea sourcing approach, the pyramid bag innovation, the famous chimps campaign, every major variant, and how to pick the right PG Tips for your kettle.

The PG Tips history

PG Tips was launched in 1930 by Brooke Bond, then one of the largest tea companies in the world, as a brand specifically positioned as "tips" of the tea plant (the youngest, most flavourful leaves at the top of each shoot). The "PG" originally stood for "Pre Gest Tee" because the brand was initially marketed as a tea to drink before meals to aid digestion, but that positioning was dropped fairly quickly and the abbreviated "PG" became the brand identity.

The brand grew through the post war decades to become the UK's biggest selling tea brand by volume by the 1970s, a position it held for decades. Brooke Bond was acquired by Unilever in 1984; Unilever owned PG Tips through its growth period of the 1990s and 2000s. In 2022 Unilever sold its global tea business (including PG Tips, Lipton, Brooke Bond, and other brands) to private equity firm CVC Capital Partners, which now operates the business as Lipton Teas and Infusions.

The ownership transitions have created some brand positioning turbulence over the last decade as new management has tested various refreshes, repositioning attempts, and product range adjustments. The core PG Tips Original product remains substantially unchanged, but the broader brand strategy has been less stable than family owned competitors like Yorkshire Tea.

The Kenya led blending approach

PG Tips is predominantly sourced from Kenyan tea estates, particularly the high altitude growing regions around Kericho. Kenyan tea (mostly CTC processed for tea bags) produces a brisker, brighter, slightly more astringent cup than Indian or Sri Lankan teas; the cup has a clean, sharp finish that PG Tips drinkers either love or find slightly too astringent.

The brand has built long standing relationships with Kenyan tea estates through the Brooke Bond and Unilever periods, and many estates have produced PG Tips leaf for multiple generations. The sourcing relationships continued through the Lipton Teas and Infusions transition.

The Kenya led approach is the defining technical feature of PG Tips and the reason for the cup character difference from Yorkshire (broader multi origin Assam led blend) and Tetley (broader multi origin balanced blend). For more on the cup character differences see the Yorkshire vs PG Tips comparison and the Tetley vs PG Tips comparison.

The pyramid bag innovation

One of PG Tips' most marketed and most influential product innovations: the pyramid tea bag, introduced in 1996 and still the brand's signature format. The pyramid format was developed in collaboration with packaging suppliers and represented a real engineering challenge to produce at the volumes PG Tips needed.

The functional benefit of the pyramid bag is real if modest:

- The 3D shape gives tea leaves more room to circulate and unfurl
- Faster infusion, which matters most for shorter brewing times
- Slightly more "loose leaf like" cup than flat bags
- The visible 3D bag in the cup is part of the perceived premium positioning

The pyramid format was a real product innovation that helped PG's market position through the 2000s. Other brands have since introduced similar or competing formats (Teapigs uses pyramid "tea temples"; Twinings has rolled out pyramid versions of several lines), but PG was the first mass market British brand to adopt it.

The chimps adverts and PG marketing history

PG Tips' marketing history is one of the longest and most distinctive in British advertising. The brand's most famous campaign is the chimps adverts, which ran from 1956 to 2002 and featured costumed chimpanzees acting out human scenarios while drinking PG Tips.

The chimps adverts were really funny, loved by generations of British viewers, and built enormous brand recognition. They also became increasingly controversial in the 1990s and early 2000s as animal welfare standards in advertising tightened; the campaign was eventually retired in 2002 partly for animal welfare reasons and partly because the brand felt the format was becoming dated.

Post chimps PG Tips marketing has experimented with multiple positioning approaches:

- **Monkey campaigns:** featuring a knitted monkey character voiced by Johnny Vegas, ran through the mid-2000s as a quasi replacement for the chimps

- **Various celebrity endorsements** including comedians and actors
- **"Make it your cup" platforms:** attempting to position PG as the personal choice tea brand
- **More recent attempts** to compete with Yorkshire's Yorkshire pride positioning, with mixed success

The brand currently doesn't command the same emotional brand loyalty as Yorkshire Tea, partly because the marketing has been less consistent over the last 15 years and partly because the brand has changed ownership multiple times.

The PG Tips range

PG Tips Original , the workhorse blend in pyramid bags. Kenya led, brisk, bright, milk friendly. The 80-bag and 240-bag boxes are the supermarket standard. This is the cup most British PG drinkers think of when they think "PG Tips".

PG Tips Decaf , the decaf version, also in pyramid bags. CO2-decaffeinated to preserve flavour; retains decent character though slightly less brisk than the caffeinated original. Suitable for evening drinking.

PG Tips Gold , the premium upgrade, occasionally rebranded as different "Gold" variants over the years. Higher grade leaf with a slightly fuller character. Less differentiated from the Original than Yorkshire Gold is from Yorkshire Original; many drinkers don't perceive a clear quality difference.

PG Tips Plant Based Tea Bags , a more recent product designed around environmentally friendly bag materials (no plastic in the bag itself). Same Original blend, more sustainable packaging.

PG Tips Loose Leaf , the loose leaf version of the Original blend, less commonly stocked but available in some retailers. Brews a slightly better cup than the bag version due to larger leaf size.

Various flavoured variants , PG has experimented with Earl Grey, fruit, and other flavoured versions over the years, with mixed market success. The brand's strength remains in the core Original product.

The plastic in tea bags controversy

PG Tips was at the centre of a high profile consumer controversy in 2018 when it emerged that standard PG Tips pyramid bags contained polypropylene to seal the bag edges, meaning they didn't fully compost in domestic compost bins. The story attracted significant media attention and consumer complaints.

The brand responded by transitioning to plant based bag materials over the following years, eventually replacing the polypropylene sealed bags with fully compostable plant based versions. The transition was complete by 2021 across most of the range. The episode damaged PG's environmental credentials in the short term but the response and product change has restored most of the brand's standing on this issue.

The episode was a useful lesson for the wider tea industry; many other brands quietly transitioned their bag materials in parallel, anticipating similar consumer pressure.

PG vs the competition

PG competes against the same main rivals as Yorkshire Tea:

- **vs Yorkshire Tea** PG is the brisker, lighter cup; Yorkshire is the heavier, maltier cup. Yorkshire has overtaken PG by value in the last decade. See the Yorkshire Tea vs PG Tips comparison.

- **vs Tetley:** very close matchup; PG is slightly brisker, Tetley is slightly rounder. Tetley is consistently cheaper. See the Tetley vs PG Tips comparison.
- **vs supermarket own label** PG is meaningfully better in cup quality but more expensive; the supermarket own labels are usually 30 to 50 percent cheaper

PG's competitive position is strongest with drinkers who specifically prefer the Kenyan tea brisker character and the pyramid bag format. For drinkers who want a heavier cup, Yorkshire is usually the better fit; for drinkers who want a lighter cup at lower cost, Tetley is usually the better fit.

The PG Tips ethical sourcing position

PG Tips carries Rainforest Alliance certification across its main range and has long standing direct relationships with Kenyan tea estates through the Brooke Bond and Unilever periods. The Lipton Teas and Infusions ownership has continued these programmes.

The brand's ethical credentials are solid but less prominently marketed than Yorkshire's Trees programme or Pukka's organic positioning. PG's sustainability story is more "we've done the basics consistently for decades" than "we have a flagship initiative we're shouting about".

How to brew PG Tips properly

Standard British black tea brewing applies:

1. **Use freshly drawn cold water** brought to a rolling boil
2. **Pour over the pyramid bag immediately:** no need to let water cool for black tea
3. **Brew for 3 to 4 minutes:** the pyramid format infuses slightly faster than flat bags so PG is decent at slightly shorter times than Yorkshire
4. **Stir, remove the bag, then add milk**
5. **Sugar optional:** the briskness pairs well with sugar for drinkers who like sweet tea

For brewing heat across every tea family, PG included, see the water temperatures guide.

What we stock

Browse the full PG Tips range. The most bought PG Tips variants on teas.co.uk:

- PG Tips Chai Special Blend, 70 Tea Bags 175g
- PG Tips Original Loose Leaf Tea, 250g
- PG Tips Original English Breakfast, 400 Tea Bags 1.16kg
- PG Tips Decaf Black Decaffeinated, 70 Tea Bags
- PG Tips Decaf Black Tea 160, 464g
- PG Tips Decaf English Breakfast, 70 Tea Bags 203g

For comparisons across the wider supermarket tea landscape, see also: Yorkshire Tea, Tetley, Teapigs, Twinings reference.

The verdict on PG Tips

PG Tips is a good everyday British black tea with a long heritage and a distinctive brisk, Kenyan led cup. It's not the heaviest cup (that's Yorkshire), it's not the cheapest (that's Tetley), it's not the most innovative right now (most of the recent innovation has come from Teapigs and the premium tier). What PG offers is a consistent, well made, brisk character cup with the convenience of mass distribution and the familiarity of a brand most British households have known for generations.

For drinkers who specifically prefer the brisk Kenyan profile and the pyramid bag format, PG remains the obvious choice. For drinkers who haven't done a side by side test against Yorkshire and Tetley in the last few years, it's worth doing one; you may find your actual taste preference doesn't match the brand habit you've built up.

The brand's slight market share decline against Yorkshire over the last decade reflects Yorkshire's superior brand building and consistent family ownership rather than any real PG quality drop. The cup is still the cup; the choice is just personal preference.

For the wider context see the black tea overview, the Yorkshire Tea vs PG Tips comparison, the Tetley vs PG Tips comparison, the inside Yorkshire Tea, the English Breakfast vs Irish Breakfast comparison, and the ultimate caffeine guide.

Quick reference: PG Tips, the brand deep dive

Fact	Plain note
Founded	1930 by Brooke Bond as a tippy CTC blend
"PG" stands for	"Pre Gest Tee" (the original name claimed it helped before meals)
Owner	Lipton Teas & Infusions (formerly Unilever)
UK market position	One of the top two British black tea brands by volume
Blend approach	Kenya-led CTC blend (Mombasa auction tea)
Iconic format	Pyramid bag (introduced 1996, biodegradable since 2018)
Famous marketing	Chimps adverts (1956-2002); Monkey adverts (2007 onward)
Best for	Strong builders mug; milk and sugar; British everyday

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · If a PG blend here sounds appealing, just try a box once. One cup of PG teaches you more than twenty articles about it.

More related guides

- Thompson's (Punjana): Belfast Family Tea Since 1896
- Glengettie: The Welsh Breakfast Tea
- Costa at Home: The Coffee Shop Range
- Island Bakery: Organic Isle of Mull Biscuits

- Islands Chocolate: Proper Hot Cocoa
- Lift: The Nostalgic Instant Lemon Tea
- NY Coffee: The New York Deli Sachet Brand
- San Benedetto: Italy's Bottled Iced Tea
- Starbucks Tea: Café Range and the Teavana Story
- True English Tea (T.E.T): Everyday and Gift Blends
- Tiséa: French Verveine and Infusions

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

> **Compare PG Tips with Twinings**
>
> PG Tips focuses on a compact Original, Gold and Decaf black-tea ladder; Twinings solves a broader flavour and tea-family brief. See the current packs, prices and use cases in PG Tips vs Twinings.

New PG Tips buying guides

These PG Tips buying guides draw on products in the teas.co.uk shop today, each dated to its catalogue review.

- Best 400-Count Tea Bags UK
- Best Tea Bags for the Office UK
- Rare and Discontinued Tea Alternatives UK

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.

