Clipper

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Clipper, in brief:** Clipper: the 1984 Dorset organic and Fairtrade pioneer, UK Fairtrade tea first, unbleached plastic free bags, broad affordable organic range, Pukka.

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

Clipper is the British organic and Fairtrade tea pioneer that proved organic and ethical positioning could work at mainstream supermarket prices. Founded in Beaminster, Dorset in 1984 by Mike and Lorraine Brehme, the brand was the first to launch certified Fairtrade tea in the UK in 1994 and one of the first to commit to organic certification right across its mass market range. Clipper has built one of the broadest organic tea ranges in British retail at price points significantly below Pukka and other premium organic competitors, occupying the affordable organic position in the category.

This guide goes deep into Clipper: the founding ethical trade story, the wide organic and Fairtrade range, the unbleached bag innovation, the ownership story, and how to navigate one of the broadest affordable organic tea catalogues in British retail.

The Clipper history

Clipper was founded in 1984 by Mike and Lorraine Brehme in Beaminster, Dorset. The founders had backgrounds in the wholefood and organic food industry and identified a gap in the British tea market for ethically sourced, organic leaning teas at accessible price points. The brand grew slowly through the 1980s and 1990s before accelerating through the 2000s as organic and Fairtrade became more mainstream consumer concerns.

Notable milestones in the brand's history:

- **1984:** founded in Beaminster, Dorset by Mike and Lorraine Brehme
- **1994:** launched the UK's first certified Fairtrade tea, a market first that established Clipper's ethical positioning
- **1999:** launched the UK's first organic tea bags in mainstream supermarket retail
- **2010:** transitioned to unbleached, plastic free tea bags across the range, becoming one of the first major brands to address the tea bag plastic problem
- **2012:** acquired by Wessanen, the Dutch organic food group (Talking Retail, March 2012)
- **2020** Wessanen renames itself Ecotone (The MBS Group, November 2020)

- **Continues** to operate with strong organic and Fairtrade positioning, broad supermarket distribution, and the founding ethical commitments

Clipper is owned by Ecotone, the European organic food group formerly called Wessanen, which bought Clipper in 2012. Its UK business, Ecotone UK, which makes Clipper, is a certified B Corp (Ecotone UK).

The Fairtrade pioneer position

Clipper's 1994 launch of certified Fairtrade tea was a market first that established the brand's ethical positioning credentials. At the time Fairtrade was a relatively niche concept in mainstream British retail; Clipper's commitment helped bring Fairtrade into supermarket distribution and demonstrated that ethical sourcing could work as a brand differentiator at mass market prices.

The Fairtrade certification covers tea sourced from certified Fairtrade producer organisations, with guaranteed minimum prices, additional Fairtrade Premium payments to producer communities, and adherence to Fairtrade labour and environmental standards. For consumers who specifically prioritise Fairtrade in their purchasing, Clipper has been one of the most consistent options available across decades.

Most of Clipper's main range carries Fairtrade certification. The brand's backing of Fairtrade has continued through changes of ownership and is part of what buyers value, alongside the organic positioning.

The organic leaning range

Clipper offers comprehensive organic certification across most of its range, though not as universally as Pukka. The brand's positioning is "organic and ethical at affordable prices" rather than "organic only premium". This has practical implications:

- **Most Clipper teas are organic** including the flagship Everyday Tea, the green tea range, the rooibos range, and most of the herbal blends
- **Some Clipper products are not organic:** particularly some of the older heritage products and some specialty blends
- **The pricing is meaningfully lower than Pukka:** typically 20 to 30 percent cheaper for comparable organic certifications
- **The supermarket distribution is broader** including the major UK chains and independent wholefood retailers

For drinkers who want organic certification across the board and don't mind premium prices, Pukka is the obvious choice. For drinkers who want organic certification at lower prices and broader range coverage, Clipper is the natural alternative. Many households happily keep both brands.

The unbleached, plastic free tea bag

Clipper transitioned to unbleached, plastic free tea bags across its range starting in 2010, well ahead of most major UK competitors. The transition addressed two related concerns:

- **Bleached tea bags:** traditional white tea bags use chlorine bleaching to achieve their colour; unbleached bags are naturally tan/brown and avoid the bleaching chemicals

- **Plastic in tea bags:** traditional tea bags use polypropylene to seal the bag edges, which doesn't compost; Clipper's plant based bag materials are fully compostable

Both concerns became more visible to mainstream consumers in the late 2010s, particularly the plastic in bags issue that prompted the high profile PG Tips controversy in 2018. Clipper's early move to unbleached, plant based bags meant the brand was already well placed when consumer pressure arrived.

The unbleached, plastic free bags are now standard across the Clipper range and form part of the brand's broader sustainability positioning. The bags have a slightly different visual appearance than conventional bleached bags (more tan coloured, slightly less rigid) but produce identical cups.

The Clipper range, category by category

Everyday black tea:

- **Clipper Organic Fairtrade Everyday Tea:** the flagship daily black tea, organic and Fairtrade certified
- **Clipper Organic Decaf Everyday Tea:** the decaf version, the same daily blend with caffeine removed
- **Clipper English Breakfast and Earl Grey:** the classic British blends in organic versions

Green tea:

- **Clipper Organic Pure Green Tea:** plain green tea in organic format
- **Various flavoured green tea blends:** lemon, mint, mango, matcha blended versions

Rooibos and red bush:

- **Clipper Organic Pure Rooibos:** the standard plain rooibos, organic certified
- **Various flavoured rooibos blends:** vanilla, caramel, and similar

Herbal infusions:

- **Single ingredient herbals:** peppermint, chamomile, fennel, ginger, lemon and ginger
- **Wellness blends** Snore & Peace (sleep blend), Sleep Easy (alternative sleep formulation), various functional blends
- **Fruit infusions:** berry blends, citrus blends

Specialty:

- **Clipper Lemon & Ginger:** the warming citrus and ginger blend, one of Clipper's most popular herbal infusions
- **Various seasonal blends:** rotating in and out of the range

The range is broad enough to cover most household tea needs from a single brand at organic and Fairtrade pricing. For the wider context see the black tea overview, the green tea overview, the rooibos overview, and the herbal tea overview.

The Clipper price advantage in organic

Clipper's competitive position is specifically as the affordable organic brand. Comparison with the main premium organic competitor:

Product type	Clipper price (approx)	Pukka price (approx)	Clipper saving
Organic everyday black tea (80 bags)	£3.50 to £4.50	Not directly comparable (Pukka doesn't make this category)	Clipper exclusive position
Organic peppermint (20 bags)	£1.80 to £2.50	£2.50 to £3.50	30 to 40 percent
Organic chamomile (20 bags)	£1.80 to £2.50	£2.50 to £3.50	30 to 40 percent
Organic green tea (20 bags)	£2 to £3	£3 to £4	25 to 35 percent

For drinkers building an organic tea cupboard on a budget, the Clipper price advantage is meaningful. For drinkers who specifically value the Pukka brand positioning or Ayurvedic philosophy, the premium pricing is justified. Both brands deliver organic certified products with credible ethical positioning; the choice often comes down to brand personality and budget rather than fundamental product quality.

Clipper vs the competition

Clipper's main competitors vary by category:

- **vs Pukka** Clipper is the affordable organic brand; Pukka is the premium organic with Ayurvedic positioning brand. Significant overlap in herbal blends but distinct positioning.
- **vs Heath & Heather:** both are affordable organic herbal brands with similar positioning; Clipper has broader supermarket distribution
- **vs Tetley and other mass market brands** Clipper is meaningfully more expensive for everyday black tea but provides organic certification that mass market competitors don't
- **vs supermarket own label organic ranges** Clipper is more expensive but has stronger brand credibility and broader range
- **vs Twinings organic range** Clipper is fully organic focused; Twinings has organic options within a much broader range that includes non organic products

Clipper's competitive position is strongest as the broad range affordable organic and Fairtrade brand for households that prioritise ethical credentials at accessible price points. For drinkers who don't specifically value organic or Fairtrade, mass market brands deliver comparable cup quality at lower prices; for drinkers who specifically value organic, Clipper is the most accessible option in the category.

The Clipper ethical sourcing position

Clipper's ethical credentials are genuinely strong, built on:

- **Fairtrade certification** across most of the range, including the founding 1994 commitment

- **Organic certification** across most of the range
- **Unbleached, plastic free tea bags** across the entire range since 2010
- **Direct trade relationships** with grower communities, building investment in tea growing regions
- **Carbon neutrality programmes:** for operations and packaging
- **Sustainable packaging:** initiatives across the range

The credentials are broadly comparable to Pukka in scope, though the specific positioning differs. Clipper emphasises Fairtrade and affordability, and its maker, Ecotone UK, is a certified B Corp; Pukka emphasises organic sourcing and Ayurvedic philosophy, and lost its B Corp certification in 2024. Both deliver credible mission driven business in a category where many mass market competitors offer minimal ethical positioning.

How to brew Clipper properly

Standard tea style brewing applies, varying by tea type:

- **Everyday black tea:** just off boiling water, 4 to 5 minutes for full character
- **Green tea:** cooled water (70 to 80°C), 2 to 3 minutes
- **Rooibos:** just off boiling water, 5 to 7 minutes (rooibos doesn't go bitter with extended brewing)
- **Herbal infusions:** just off boiling water, 5 to 10 minutes for full extraction

The unbleached bags don't require any special brewing approach; they perform identically to bleached bags in terms of cup quality. Brewing temperatures for each tea family are set out in the water temperatures guide .

What we stock

Browse the full Clipper range. The most bought Clipper products on teas.co.uk:

- Clipper Organic Everyday, 80 Tea Bags 232g
- Clipper Fairtrade Everyday Tea, 80 Pack 232g
- Clipper Fairtrade Organic Decaf Latin American Instant Coffee, 100g
- Clipper Fairtrade Organic Green Tea, 80 Tea Bags 160g
- Clipper Fairtrade Restoring Roots Ginger & Turmeric Organic, 20 Tea Bags 36g
- Clipper Organic and Fairtrade Decaffeinated Tea, 40 Tea Bags 116g

For comparisons across the wider organic and herbal landscape, see also: Pukka, Heath & Heather, Dragonfly, Twinings, Teapigs.

The verdict on Clipper

Clipper is the British affordable organic and Fairtrade tea brand. Broad range coverage, organic and Fairtrade certification across the line, unbleached plastic free bags and much lower prices than Pukka make it one of the strongest brands in the affordable organic segment. The brand's 40-year heritage of ethical positioning provides credibility that newer mission driven brands have to build from scratch.

For drinkers who specifically prioritise organic and Fairtrade in their daily tea purchasing but don't want to pay Pukka premium prices, Clipper is the obvious default. For drinkers who want the more visibly premium positioning and Ayurvedic philosophy of Pukka, the price premium is justified by the brand experience even though the cup quality is broadly comparable.

Clipper has kept its organic and Fairtrade positioning under Wessanen and then Ecotone.

For the wider context see the black tea overview, the green tea overview, the rooibos overview, the herbal tea overview, the decaf vs caffeine free comparison, the Pukka deep dive, and the Teapigs deep dive.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · For Clipper fans, one good loose leaf in a clean pot still beats five exotic bags gulped down.

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