Herbal Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Herbal tea, in summary:** Herbal tea is not true tea: a naturally caffeine-free infusion of herbs, flowers and roots. The families, what the evidence says, and where marketing overreaches.

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

Herbal tea is any hot infusion made without the tea plant: herbs, spices, flowers, fruits, roots or bark in hot water, and caffeine free unless the box names yerba mate, guayusa or green tea. Herbal tea is technically not tea at all. True tea comes from *Camellia sinensis*, the tea plant; herbal teas (more accurately called "herbal infusions" or "tisanes") are made from any other plant material, including herbs, spices, flowers, fruits, roots, and bark. The category is enormous, covering everything from the universally popular chamomile and peppermint to specialist single ingredient infusions and busy multi component blends. What unites the category is the absence of caffeine in most products and the use of brewing methods similar to true tea.

Here you will find the main sub categories, the best known single ingredient herbals, how blends are built, what the evidence supports for herbal claims, and a way through one of the biggest categories in British tea retail.

The herbal tea categories

The herbal tea world divides into several distinct sub categories, each with their own characteristics and use cases:

Classic herbal infusions:

- Chamomile, the universally popular evening sleep tea
- Peppermint, fresh and menthol cool
- Lemon balm, gentle citrus character with mild sleep effects
- Verbena (lemon verbena), bright lemony herbal
- Lavender, floral with a gently relaxing effect

Spice based herbal teas:

- Ginger, warming and useful for nausea

- Cinnamon, sweet and warming
- Cardamom, complex aromatic spice
- Turmeric, an earthy golden spice
- Fennel, aniseed flavoured after dinner cup

Fruit and floral teas:

- Hibiscus, tart and refreshing
- Rosehip, vitamin C source
- Berry blends, mixed fruit infusions
- Rose petals, floral and aromatic
- Jasmine flowers, sweet and perfumed

Root and bark teas:

- Liquorice root, naturally sweet (with blood pressure cautions)
- Marshmallow root, a mild and slightly sweet root infusion
- Dandelion root, a bitter root found in many blends
- Burdock root, an old fashioned earthy herb

Wellness blends:

- Sleep blends (chamomile + lavender + valerian + lemon balm)
- Dandelion based blends (dandelion + milk thistle + nettle + others)
- Cold and flu blends (echinacea + elderberry + ginger + others)
- After meal blends (peppermint + fennel + ginger + others)
- Energy blends (yerba mate + green tea + adaptogens; these typically contain caffeine)

The naturally caffeine free non tea drinks:

- Rooibos and red bush, the South African red bush plant; see the rooibos overview
- Honeybush, similar to rooibos with natural honey like sweetness
- Yerba mate, the South American caffeinated herb (technical exception to the caffeine free rule)

The category breadth is enormous; specialist tea retailers can carry 50+ distinct herbal infusions. Major mainstream brands typically carry 15 to 25 herbal options.

The classic single ingredient herbals

The most popular herbal teas in British retail are typically single ingredient infusions. The four most important to know:

Chamomile, the universal evening tea. Chamomile flowers (typically German chamomile, *Matricaria chamomilla*) produce a gentle floral cup with a soft, mellow character. In Britain it is the usual evening cup, drunk to wind down rather than to treat anything. See the chamomile overview.

Peppermint, the everyday refreshing herbal. Peppermint leaves (*Mentha piperita*) produce a fresh, bright cup with a menthol cooling note. A common cup once the plates are cleared, a long standing habit. The most versatile herbal tea for everyday use. See the peppermint overview.

Ginger, the warming, settling cup. Ginger root (*Zingiber officinale*) produces a warming, slightly spicy cup with a long traditional reputation for settling the stomach. A comforting choice for travel queasiness and general digestive ease. See the ginger tea overview.

Lemon and ginger, the best known pairing on British shelves. Combines ginger's warming character with lemon's brightness; particularly popular as a winter warming drink. Available from virtually every herbal tea brand.

These four cover most of the everyday herbal use cases for British households. Building beyond these into the wider herbal world is largely about finding specific functional or flavour preferences.

A realistic note on herbal claims

The herbal category attracts a lot of health marketing, so it is worth being clear about what these infusions realistically do.

A few herbs have a gentle, traditional reputation that most people recognise: ginger and peppermint as settling, after-meal cups; chamomile as a bedtime drink; fennel as a traditional digestive. These are pleasant, comforting habits rather than treatments, and the effect is mild.

Most of the bolder marketing does not hold up:

- **Promises that a tea will flush out or purify the body** are mostly marketing; the liver and kidneys already do that job and need no help from tea
- **Skinny tea and weight loss claims:** usually rely on laxative or diuretic herbs producing short term water loss, not fat loss
- **Pick me up and protection claims** are modest at best, and any lift is usually down to caffeine rather than the other ingredients
- **Chronic disease prevention claims** are plausible in places but not well supported, and tea is not a substitute for medical care

The plain framing: herbal teas are pleasant drinks with a few mild traditional reputations, but most of the big marketing claims are exaggerated. The teas are still pleasant, hydrating, and culturally important; they just aren't medical treatments.

Herbals for sleep and rest

One of the largest sub categories. The major sleep supporting herbal teas:

- **Chamomile:** the standard evening tea, mild sleep effects
- **Lavender:** sometimes added to sleep blends for the floral character and mild relaxation
- **Lemon balm:** gentle citrus character with a mild reputation for easing stress

- **Valerian root:** a stronger, more traditional sleep herb but an acquired taste (smells musty); often combined with chamomile and lemon balm in commercial sleep blends
- **Passionflower:** traditional sleep aid less common in mass market British retail
- **California poppy:** a mild evening herb, occasionally in specialty sleep blends

Major commercial sleep blends combine 4 to 6 of these in specific ratios. Pukka Night Time, Yogi Bedtime, Twinings Sleep, Clipper Snore & Peace are the most popular British supermarket options. See the best tea for sleep guide.

Digestion herbals

The other major functional sub category. The major digestion supporting herbal teas:

- **Peppermint:** the usual cup after a meal
- **Fennel:** a traditional aniseed-flavoured after-dinner cup
- **Ginger:** the warming, slightly spicy root
- **Chamomile:** mild digestive support alongside the sleep effects
- **Cardamom:** traditional Ayurvedic digestive spice
- **Liquorice root:** traditionally taken for digestive comfort, but contains compounds that can affect blood pressure, so use it only occasionally

The classic after dinner pot is usually peppermint, fennel, or a blend of the two with ginger.

Cold and flu herbals

When a cold or flu strikes, a hot herbal cup is mostly about comfort, warmth, and staying hydrated rather than treatment. The traditional British favourites:

- **Hot lemon and ginger with honey:** the classic winter cup, hot and sweet
- **Ginger:** warming, with a comforting bite for a scratchy throat
- **Peppermint or eucalyptus:** aromatic herbs that feel clearing when you are congested
- **Echinacea and elderberry blends:** popular cold-season blends, though the evidence behind them is modest

None of these treats a cold. They are comforting drinks that help you keep fluids up while a cold runs its course; persistent, severe, or worsening symptoms are worth a word with a pharmacist or GP.

How to brew herbal infusions properly

Herbal infusions need different brewing than true tea. The key differences:

1. **Use freshly drawn cold water** brought to a rolling boil. Most herbs benefit from boiling water for full extraction.
2. **Use 1 to 2 teaspoons of dried herb per 200ml cup** (if you brew loose leaf) or 1 tea bag in each cup
3. **Steep for 5 to 10 minutes:** longer than true tea; the herbal compounds need time to release fully

4. **Some herbs benefit from 10+ minutes** (chamomile flowers, dried roots, dense spice blends)
5. **Don't add milk** to most herbal infusions; the flavour is designed to stand alone
6. **Honey or lemon optional:** complementary to many herbal blends

The longer brewing time is the most common mistake new herbal drinkers make. Brewing chamomile or peppermint for 3 minutes (the typical black tea brewing time) produces a thin cup; 7 to 10 minutes is closer to the proper full extraction approach. Kettle settings for each family of herbal tea are in the water temperatures guide.

Pregnancy and herbal tea cautions

Some herbal teas are flagged as inappropriate during pregnancy. The list isn't exhaustive but the most commonly flagged include:

- **Liquorice root** can affect blood pressure
- **Sage in tea concentrations:** occasionally flagged for high consumption
- **Pennyroyal:** never safe in pregnancy
- **Senna and other strong laxative herbs:** generally avoided
- **Raspberry leaf in early pregnancy:** generally not recommended in first/second trimesters
- **Heavy detox or weight loss blends:** often contain herbs inappropriate during pregnancy

The general principle: a single cup of an unfamiliar herbal tea is rarely a problem, but daily concentrated consumption of any herb during pregnancy should be discussed with a midwife.

What we stock

Browse the full herbal tea range. The most bought herbal infusions on teas.co.uk:

- Teapigs Chocolate and Mint, 15 Tea Bags 37.5g
- Twinings Bioblends Lemon, Ginger and Turmeric, 18 Tea Bags 40g
- Hyson Peach Infused Black Tea, 32 Tea Bags 32g
- Dalgety Strong Lemon & Ginger Herbal, 18 Tea Bags 54g
- Yorkshire Tea Cherry Bakewell Brew, 40 Tea Bags 112g
- Yorkshire Tea Bedtime Brew, 40 Tea Bags 100g

That is a stock list, not a recommendation. For which of these to actually buy, with per cup prices and a pick for each use case, see best herbal tea UK, ranked by use case.

Brand level archives: Pukka, Twinings, Clipper, Yogi, Dragonfly, Heath & Heather.

The verdict on herbal tea

Herbal tea is a huge category that runs from a plain chamomile cup in the evening to blends with a long list of ingredients. The category earns its shelf space for plain reasons: a caffeine free option, more flavour variety alongside true tea, and one more way to take in fluids through the day.

The marketing wrapped around herbal tea is often exaggerated; real effects are mostly mild, and the loudest promises of purging toxins or shrinking your waistline are pure marketing. None of that makes herbal tea pointless; the realistic way to see it is as a pleasant drink that sometimes comforts, not as medical treatment.

Most British households are well served by a herbal tea cupboard of chamomile, peppermint, ginger and one or two blends. After that, wandering further into herbal tea is a pleasure if you like variety, and specialist shops and online retailers stock hundreds of different infusions for anyone who wants to dig in.

True tea and herbal infusions work side by side: caffeinated brews carry the morning and the afternoon, while herbal infusions take over in the evening and for jobs like an after dinner pot or a bedtime cup. Both categories have their place; neither replaces the other.

For the wider context see the chamomile overview, the peppermint overview, the ginger overview, the rooibos overview, the chai overview, the best tea for sleep guide, and the decaf vs caffeine free comparison.

Herbal tea, at a glance

Category	The plain read
What it is	No true tea; a caffeine-free infusion of herbs/flowers/roots
Sleep/stress	Chamomile, lavender, valerian: mild, evening cups
Digestion	Peppermint, ginger, fennel: real mild comfort
Cold/flu	Comfort and warm fluids; not a treatment
"Detox/cleanse"	Often a laxative; marketing, not health
Brew	Full boil, long covered steep; under-brewing is the usual fault

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · If a herbal tea here catches your eye, brew one cup and see. One cup of chamomile or peppermint tells you more than twenty pages of reading.

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