Iced Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Iced tea, in summary:** Iced tea is a family of methods, hot-brewed-then-chilled, cold brew, sweet tea, cocktails, all sharing one rule: brew the base strong because ice.

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

Iced tea is one of the most undervalued summer drinks in British retail, ranging from the simple cooled cup of tea to elaborate flavoured creations that rival commercial soft drinks for refreshment without the sugar load. The British iced tea tradition is much smaller than the American or East Asian traditions, but the basic technique works equally well in a British summer; made properly, iced tea refreshes better than shop bought cans of sugary fizz, at a fraction of the cost. This guide covers the multiple iced tea approaches, the family by family methods, and how to build an iced tea repertoire for British summer drinking.

The four iced tea methods

Four distinct approaches produce iced tea, each with different character:

1. Hot brewed and cooled, the classic British approach. Brew tea hot at standard strength, allow to cool to room temperature, pour over ice. Quick to prepare; produces decent iced tea though slightly more astringent than cold brewing.

2. Hot brewed strong, then iced, the slightly better hot approach. Brew tea hot at double strength (2 tea bags per 200ml of water rather than 1), then pour directly over a generous quantity of ice; the ice dilutes the strong tea to standard strength while cooling it. Produces brighter, more aromatic iced tea than the cool then ice approach.

3. Cold brewing, the highest quality approach for most teas. Steep tea in cold water for 6 to 12 hours, refrigerated; produces dramatically smoother iced tea with less bitterness and more sweetness. See the cold brew tea guide for the complete technique.

4. Sun tea, the romantic but inadvisable traditional approach. Tea steeped in cold water in a glass jar placed in the sun for several hours. Some food safety concerns (sun tea isn't sufficiently heated to kill bacteria, and the warm but not hot environment can favour bacterial growth); cold brewing in the fridge is the safer modern equivalent.

For most British drinkers, methods 2 and 3 produce the best results. The hot strong then iced approach is fast (suitable for "I want iced tea now"); the cold brew approach is best (worth the overnight wait for daily

summer drinking).

The classic iced tea recipes

A few specific iced tea recipes worth knowing:

Classic British iced black tea:

1. Brew 4 strong tea bags in 250ml of just boiled water for 5 minutes
2. Sweeten while still hot if desired (sugar dissolves better in hot water)
3. Pour over a tall glass full of ice
4. Top up with cold water or extra ice as needed
5. Add a slice of lemon or sprig of mint

Classic American Southern Sweet Tea:

1. Brew 4 to 6 black tea bags for 5 minutes in 1 litre of water from a fresh boil
2. Add 1/2 to 1 cup of sugar while still hot, stirring to dissolve
3. Add another 1 litre of cold water
4. Refrigerate until cold
5. Serve it over ice with lemon on the side

(Note: traditional American sweet tea is very sweet by British standards; reduce sugar significantly for British palates if making this recipe.)

Iced green tea:

1. Use the cold brew method for best results: 4 green tea bags in 1 litre of cold water, refrigerate 6 to 8 hours
2. Strain, serve over ice
3. Add lemon, mint, or a small amount of honey if desired

Iced hibiscus (agua de jamaica):

1. Boil 2 cups of water, add 1 cup of dried hibiscus flowers and 1/2 cup of sugar
2. Simmer for 5 minutes; the cup turns dramatic ruby red
3. Strain into a pitcher with 6 cups of cold water
4. Add a stick of cinnamon and slices of lime
5. Refrigerate; serve over ice with a fresh lime wedge

See the hibiscus overview for more on this drink.

Iced peppermint tea:

1. Cold brew 5 peppermint tea bags in 1 litre of cold water, refrigerate overnight
2. Strain, serve over ice

3. Add fresh mint sprigs and a small amount of honey if desired

One of the most refreshing summer drinks; particularly good after sport or on hot afternoons.

Iced matcha latte:

1. Whisk 1 teaspoon of matcha powder with 60ml of cool water (70°C, not hot) until smooth
2. Fill a tall glass with ice
3. Add 200ml of cold milk (oat milk works particularly well)
4. Pour the matcha mixture over the milk and ice
5. Sweeten with vanilla syrup or honey to taste

See the matcha overview for more on matcha preparation.

Iced tea for British weather

British summer is more variable than American or Mediterranean climates; iced tea fits British weather more episodically. The practical approach for British iced tea drinking:

- **Keep a jug of cold brewed tea in the fridge through summer:** ready when warm weather arrives without notice
- **Use cold brewed tea on warm office days:** particularly when central heating or solar gain makes offices uncomfortable
- **Iced tea works year round for hot environments:** hot kitchens, gym sessions, summer events, even some heated indoor spaces in winter
- **Adapt to British "warm" temperatures:** you don't need American summer heat to appreciate iced tea; cold tea on a 22°C British afternoon is properly refreshing

For drinkers who only think of iced tea in the context of holidays abroad, integrating it into British daily summer drinking expands the seasonal beverage repertoire usefully.

Iced tea vs commercial soft drinks

One specific framing worth considering: iced tea as alternative to commercial soft drinks. The comparison:

Drink	Calories per 330ml	Sugar	Caffeine
Cola	140	35g	32mg
Energy drink	150 to 200	40g+	80mg+
Sweetened iced tea (commercial)	100 to 150	25 to 35g	20 to 40mg
Home cold brew iced tea unsweetened	2 to 5	0g	30 to 50mg
Home cold brew with 1 tsp sugar	20 to 25	4g	30 to 50mg
Cold brew herbal infusion	0 to 5	0g	0mg

For drinkers wanting summer refreshment without the sugar and calorie load of commercial soft drinks, home prepared iced tea is dramatically better. The cost difference is also significant: 1 litre of cold brewed

tea costs around £0.30 in tea bags vs £1.50+ for an equivalent volume of commercial soft drink.

Iced tea garnishes and additions

Iced tea takes well to a wide range of additions:

- **Lemon, lime, or orange slices:** the classic citrus pairings
- **Fresh herbs:** mint, basil, lemon balm, rosemary
- **Fresh fruit:** berries, peach slices, melon balls
- **Cucumber slices:** surprisingly refreshing in iced green tea
- **Spices:** ginger slices, star anise, cinnamon stick
- **Edible flowers:** jasmine, rose petals, lavender (sparingly)
- **Sweeteners if desired:** honey, agave, sugar, simple syrup; less is generally better
- **Tonic water or sparkling water:** for a sparkling iced tea variation

For drinkers building iced tea repertoire, experimenting with different combinations creates ongoing variety; the basic cold brew technique provides the foundation, the additions provide the differentiation.

Iced tea cocktails and mocktails

One growth area worth knowing: iced tea as cocktail and mocktail base. The low tannin smoothness of cold brewed tea makes it excellent for mixing:

Tea mocktails:

- Hibiscus iced tea with sparkling water and lime; a smart alcohol free option
- Cold brew Earl Grey with elderflower cordial and tonic; aromatic and complex
- Cold brew jasmine green tea with lemonade; refreshing summer drink
- Cold brew chamomile with apple juice and cinnamon; comforting non alcoholic option

Tea cocktails (for drinkers who include alcohol):

- Long Island Iced Tea (the classic high alcohol cocktail; not actually tea based but named for the colour)
- Earl Grey gin and tonic; cold brew Earl Grey with gin and tonic water
- Hibiscus rum punch; the Caribbean tradition
- Whisky and Lapsang; some bartenders use lapsang infusion in whisky cocktails for smoky character
- Vodka green tea spritz; cold brew green tea with vodka and soda

For drinkers exploring tea based mixology, cold brewing provides the cleanest base; hot brewed teas often have too much tannin for clean cocktail mixing. The recent growth of mocktail culture has increased interest in tea based non alcoholic drinks.

Storage and shelf life

Iced tea storage considerations:

- **Refrigerated storage:** all iced tea must be kept cold; bacterial growth at warm temperatures is a real food safety issue
- **Drink it soon:** no keeping time is given here for home made iced tea; keep it covered in the fridge
- **Sealed container:** prevents fridge odour absorption
- **Don't refreeze:** freezing changes the cup character; make fresh batches rather than freezing

Make small batches often rather than one big batch to keep: that way the jug in the fridge is always fresh.

What we stock for iced tea

Browse the full black tea range, green tea range, herbal tea range, and fruit tea range for iced tea options. The most bought iced tea suitable products on teas.co.uk:

- Teapigs Chocolate and Mint, 15 Tea Bags 37.5g
- True English Tea (T.E.T) Everyday English No 1, 20 Tea Bags 40g
- Typhoo QT One Cup Instant Tea With Whitener, 125g
- Twinings Bioblends Lemon, Ginger and Turmeric, 18 Tea Bags 40g
- True English Tea (T.E.T) Everyday Green Tea, 20 Tea Bags 35g
- Hyson Peach Infused Black Tea, 32 Tea Bags 32g

For comparisons across the wider tea landscape, see also: Twinings, Teapigs, Yorkshire Tea, Dragonfly, Clipper, Pukka.

Why iced tea earns its place

Iced tea is one of the more undervalued summer drinks available to British consumers. The combination of low cost, easy preparation, dramatic improvement over commercial sugary alternatives, and broad family by family applicability makes it one of the higher quality summer beverage upgrades available.

For drinkers who default to commercial soft drinks for summer refreshment, switching to home prepared iced tea provides better refreshment with significantly less sugar and lower cost. The transition requires only the willingness to brew tea overnight in the fridge; no specialist equipment, no complex technique, no learning curve.

For drinkers who already drink hot tea daily, adding iced tea brings seasonal variety; cold brewed jasmine in summer is a different drink from hot brewed jasmine in winter, and both have their place across the year.

Don't be intimidated by the iced tea category; the basic technique is one of the simplest in beverage preparation. A jug of tea bags steeped overnight in the fridge produces excellent iced tea; everything beyond that is variation and refinement rather than necessity.

Source noted

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

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Freshness beats provenance for most drinkers. Buy a smaller bag more often.

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