Liquorice Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Liquorice, in summary:** Liquorice tea is a powerful, naturally sweet, caffeine free root infusion, traditionally drunk for sore throats and after meals but with a real blood pressure caution.

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

Liquorice tea is the naturally sweet herbal infusion made from the root of the liquorice plant (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), used in herbal medicine for over 4,000 years across traditional Chinese, Ayurvedic, and Western herbal systems. The dried root produces a distinctively sweet cup (the active sweetener compound, glycyrrhizin, is approximately 50 times sweeter than sucrose) with characteristic aniseed aromatic character similar to liquorice confectionery. Liquorice has reasonable evidence for digestive and respiratory applications but comes with important blood pressure cautions that mean it shouldn't be drunk heavily on a daily basis.

This guide covers everything about liquorice tea: the plant heritage, the traditional and modern uses, the important blood pressure cautions, the proper brewing approach, and the major commercial blends.

The liquorice plant

Liquorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) is a perennial flowering plant in the legume family (Fabaceae), native to southern Europe, the Mediterranean, and parts of West Asia. The part used is the root, which can be harvested when the plant is 3 to 5 years old. The fresh root has a fibrous texture and naturally sweet character; processed into dried root or extract, liquorice is used across food, confectionery and pharmacy products.

The Latin name "Glycyrrhiza" combines Greek words meaning "sweet root", reflecting the most distinctive feature. The root has been used in:

- **Traditional Chinese medicine** where liquorice (gancao) is one of the most frequently used herbs in classical formulas; appears in roughly 30 percent of all traditional Chinese herbal prescriptions
- **Ayurvedic medicine** where liquorice (yashtimadhu) has digestive, respiratory, and rejuvenative applications
- **Greek and Roman medicine:** documented uses dating back to Hippocrates

- **Egyptian medicine:** liquorice was found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, suggesting a place in ancient Egyptian medicine
- **European folk medicine:** particularly for cough and respiratory complaints

Modern liquorice is grown commercially in Spain, Italy, Iran, Russia, China, and parts of the Middle East. Spanish and Italian liquorice is often considered premium quality for confectionery use; Chinese liquorice dominates herbal medicine markets.

The blood pressure caution

Important upfront: liquorice has significant blood pressure effects that limit safe consumption levels. The active compound glycyrrhizin (or glycyrrhizic acid) inhibits an enzyme that normally inactivates cortisol; the result is artificially raised, cortisol like activity that causes water and sodium retention, pushing up blood pressure.

The clinical implications:

- **Daily heavy consumption** (multiple cups of strong liquorice tea daily for weeks) can produce measurable blood pressure increases
- **Existing hypertension:** people with high blood pressure should avoid heavy liquorice consumption
- **Pregnancy:** liquorice is generally avoided during pregnancy due to potential effects on cortisol and pregnancy outcomes
- **Heart conditions:** people with heart conditions should discuss liquorice consumption with their doctor
- **Kidney conditions:** similar cautions apply
- **Drug interactions:** liquorice can interact with diuretics, blood pressure medications, and various other prescription drugs

For healthy adults, occasional liquorice tea (a few cups per week) is generally fine. The cautions apply to heavy daily consumption (multiple strong cups daily for weeks). For drinkers who specifically enjoy liquorice tea daily, "DGL liquorice" (deglycyrrhizinated liquorice) is available; the glycyrrhizin has been removed, eliminating the blood pressure effects while preserving most of the digestive and other beneficial properties.

The liquorice flavour profile

Liquorice tea has a distinctive flavour profile:

- **Powerful natural sweetness:** the dominant note; intensely sweet without added sugar
- **Aniseed aromatic character:** similar to fennel but stronger and more distinctive
- **Slight earthy undertone:** particularly in pure liquorice root tea
- **Pale gold to amber cup colour**
- **Long sweet finish:** the cup lingers significantly
- **Polarising:** drinkers either love or strongly dislike the flavour

The sweetness is very pronounced; many drinkers find pure liquorice tea too sweet for comfort. Liquorice is more often used in moderate proportions in blends (where the sweetness balances other herbs) than as the dominant ingredient.

Common liquorice blends

Liquorice typically appears in blends rather than as single ingredient tea:

Liquorice + peppermint the classic combination; the cooling peppermint balances the warming sweet liquorice. Teapigs Liquorice and Peppermint is the popular British retail version.

Liquorice + ginger double warming combination; useful for digestion and as an after meal blend.

Liquorice + fennel double aniseed flavour digestive blend.

Liquorice + nettle + dandelion traditional spring tonic combination.

Liquorice + cinnamon + ginger + cardamom traditional Ayurvedic style digestive blend.

"everyday" and purifying style blends liquorice commonly appears in commercial blends sold on purity; the natural sweetness makes them more drinkable than unsweetened alternatives.

For drinkers wanting moderate liquorice exposure, the blends provide pleasant introduction without the full intensity of pure liquorice.

What liquorice is traditionally used for

Liquorice has a long traditional reputation for a few specific things:

- **Soothing a sore throat:** the natural sweetness and demulcent character coat and soothe an irritated throat; this is the use most people recognise
- **Digestive comfort:** traditionally taken for indigestion and a settled stomach
- **A warming after-dinner cup:** the sweet, aniseed character suits the end of a meal

For an occasional sore throat or after-meal cup, liquorice is a pleasant, traditional choice. It is not a treatment, and the blood-pressure caution above means it is not one for daily heavy use.

How to brew liquorice tea properly

Liquorice root requires longer brewing than leaf herbals:

1. **Use freshly drawn cold water** brought to a rolling boil
2. **Use 1 teaspoon of dried liquorice root** (loose), or 1 bag of liquorice tea in a 200ml cup
3. **Steep for 8 to 10 minutes:** longer than leaf herbals; the root needs time to release sweetness and active compounds
4. **Cover the cup or pot during brewing**
5. **Strain or remove the bag**
6. **No additional sweetener needed:** the natural liquorice sweetness is usually plenty
7. **Drink hot or warm:** particularly good after meals or for a sore throat

Liquorice apart, every family's heat is given in the water temperatures guide.

Liquorice and pregnancy

Liquorice is one of the herbal teas specifically flagged as inappropriate during pregnancy. The clinical evidence:

- Heavy liquorice consumption during pregnancy has been associated with shorter gestation, reduced child cognitive performance, and increased ADHD like symptoms in studies
- The mechanism likely involves the cortisol related effects of glycyrrhizin during fetal development
- The studies showing these effects involved heavy daily consumption (typically equivalent to multiple liquorice products per day)
- Occasional cups during pregnancy are unlikely to cause issues, but the cautious approach is to avoid liquorice during pregnancy

For pregnant women, the practical guidance is: avoid heavy daily liquorice consumption; occasional cups are unlikely to cause issues but the precautionary approach is sensible. Discuss with your midwife if you've been a heavy liquorice drinker before pregnancy.

Liquorice tea vs liquorice confectionery

One distinction worth clarifying: traditional liquorice confectionery (liquorice allsorts, Pontefract cakes, Australian black liquorice) and modern "liquorice flavour" sweets are different products with different liquorice content levels. Many modern "liquorice" sweets use anise flavouring rather than actual liquorice root extract; traditional liquorice confectionery uses real liquorice extract and can deliver significant glycyrrhizin doses.

For drinkers concerned about total liquorice intake, both tea and confectionery contribute to the daily load. Heavy consumption of traditional liquorice confectionery alongside daily liquorice tea drinking can produce measurable health effects; both should be considered together.

What we stock

Browse the herbal tea range. Liquorice containing products on teas.co.uk:

- Teapigs Liquorice and Peppermint, the classic British retail liquorice blend

For comparisons across the wider herbal tea landscape, see also: Teapigs, Pukka, Twinings, Clipper, Yogi.

What liquorice is for, and when to skip it

Liquorice tea is the powerful, naturally sweet herbal worth knowing for particular uses (a sore throat, an after dinner cup, an occasional warmer) but it isn't right for heavy daily drinking because of the blood pressure effect.

For drinkers who enjoy the liquorice flavour, occasional liquorice tea (a few cups per week) provides pleasant variety and modest functional benefits. For drinkers wanting daily liquorice flavour without the blood pressure concerns, DGL liquorice tea (deglycyrrhizinated) is available from specialist herbal retailers and

provides the flavour without the cortisol related effects.

The blend approach (liquorice + peppermint, liquorice + ginger) provides moderate liquorice exposure with broader functional positioning; for most drinkers, the blends are the practical way to access liquorice's character without the intensity of pure liquorice tea.

Don't drink liquorice tea daily without considering total intake. The blood pressure considerations are real and clinically meaningful at heavy consumption levels; occasional use is fine, but a strong cup of pure liquorice tea every day for months can produce measurable health effects. The cautious approach is intermittent use combined with attention to other liquorice sources (confectionery) to keep total intake at reasonable levels.

Frequently asked questions

Is liquorice tea safe to drink every day? Occasional cups (a few per week) are generally fine for healthy adults; daily heavy consumption (multiple strong cups daily for weeks) can raise blood pressure and is not recommended. If you want a daily liquorice flavour, switch to DGL (deglycyrrhizinated) liquorice or to a liquorice + peppermint blend where the liquorice content is moderate.

What is DGL liquorice? Deglycyrrhizinated liquorice: the glycyrrhizin (the compound behind the blood pressure effects) is removed during processing, leaving most of the rest of the root intact. DGL is available from specialist herbal retailers and is the safer option for drinkers who want regular liquorice tea consumption.

Why is liquorice tea so sweet without sugar? Glycyrrhizin, the active sweet compound in liquorice root, is approximately 50 times sweeter than sucrose. A small amount of liquorice provides intense natural sweetness; this is the same compound that makes liquorice useful as a sugar free sweetener in some commercial products.

Can liquorice tea help a sore throat? Yes; its demulcent quality (the natural sweetness coats an irritated throat) makes liquorice tea useful for sore throats. Alongside honey, lemon and the usual cold and flu measures, liquorice does its part.

Does liquorice tea help after a meal? Yes; liquorice has a long traditional reputation for digestive comfort, particularly for indigestion and a settled stomach.

Why is liquorice not safe in pregnancy? Heavy liquorice consumption during pregnancy has been associated with shorter gestation, reduced child cognitive performance, and ADHD like symptoms in studies; the cautious approach is to avoid liquorice tea during pregnancy, even though occasional cups are unlikely to cause harm.

Does liquorice tea contain caffeine? No, zero caffeine; liquorice is a herbal infusion (a tisane) made from root rather than from the tea plant *Camellia sinensis*. Suitable for evening drinking from a caffeine perspective, though the blood pressure considerations still apply for heavy use.

Buying liquorice tea in the UK

Liquorice tea sits in the herbal blend section of most British supermarkets, almost always combined with peppermint, fennel, ginger, or cinnamon rather than sold pure. Teapigs Liquorice and Peppermint is the most recognisable British retail liquorice tea and is the practical introduction for most drinkers; Pukka, Yogi,

and Heath & Heather all stock liquorice containing blends in mainstream supermarkets. For pure single ingredient liquorice root or DGL liquorice, specialty herbal retailers and traditional medical herbalists are the right route.

The teas.co.uk herbal tea range includes the main blends with liquorice; UK delivery is free above £35, and each product card shows a per cup price for comparing pack sizes. For wider brand context see Teapigs, Pukka, Twinings brand profile, Clipper, and Yogi.

For the wider context see the herbal tea overview, the peppermint overview, the fennel overview, the ginger overview, the honeybush overview, the ultimate caffeine guide, and the Teapigs deep dive.

liquorice tea at a glance

Aspect	Short answer
What it is	Naturally sweet caffeine-free root infusion (Glycyrrhiza glabra)
Genuine uses	Sore throats, after meals; DGL best for the gut
Real caution	Glycyrrhizin raises BP, retains sodium, lowers potassium
EFSA-style limit	A few cups/week fine; not daily strong cups
Avoid	Pregnancy, hypertension, heart/kidney, some meds
Safer routes	DGL, or peppermint/fennel blends

Common picks around this topic: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. The full tea shop is open for liquorice and gentler herbals; UK delivery is free past £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Price liquorice tea by the cup, not by the box. Loose root usually wins, though a supermarket box sometimes does.

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