Honeybush Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Honeybush, in summary:** Honeybush is rooibos's sweeter, more aromatic South African cousin: naturally caffeine-free and smooth.

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

Honeybush is the underappreciated South African cousin of rooibos, made from the leaves and stems of *Cyclopia* species native to the southern Cape regions. Like rooibos, honeybush is naturally caffeine free, low in tannins, and produces a smooth, slightly sweet cup; the distinctive feature is the natural honey like sweetness that gives the plant its name. The honey character comes from the plant itself rather than added sweetening, making honeybush one of the more naturally sweet herbal teas available without sugar additions.

This guide covers where honeybush grows, how it compares with rooibos, how to brew it, which commercial products to look for, and how it fits among the other caffeine free teas.

The honeybush plant

Honeybush refers to several species of the *Cyclopia* genus, native to the fynbos region of South Africa's southern Cape. The plant is in the legume family (Fabaceae), distantly related to rooibos but distinct in species and character. The most commonly cultivated species for tea include *Cyclopia genistoides*, *Cyclopia subternata*, and *Cyclopia intermedia*.

The honey in the name refers to the honeyed scent of the flowering plant: when the small yellow flowers open in spring, the bushes give off a strong honey sweet fragrance that carries across the surrounding fynbos. Indigenous Khoisan peoples have used the plant for centuries; commercial cultivation grew substantially through the 20th century, and the modern honeybush industry took shape mainly in the 1990s and 2000s as herbal teas gained ground internationally.

Production is concentrated in the southern Cape regions of South Africa, particularly around the towns of Bredasdorp, Heidelberg, and Albertinia. The plant requires specific fynbos growing conditions; cultivation outside South Africa has been limited and produces different character than authentic Cape honeybush. For more on the related rooibos see the rooibos overview.

The honeybush flavour profile

Honeybush has a distinctive flavour profile:

- **Natural honey like sweetness:** the dominant note; significantly sweeter than rooibos without added sweetening
- **Mild floral character:** gentle and not overpowering
- **Smooth body:** similar mouthfeel to rooibos
- **Amber to red brown cup colour**
- **Long sweet finish:** the cup lingers pleasantly
- **No bitterness:** similar to rooibos in smooth no tannin character

The natural sweetness is what most distinguishes honeybush from rooibos. Where rooibos has a slightly more woody, earthy character, honeybush leads with the honey floral notes. For drinkers who like rooibos but want a sweeter profile without adding sugar, honeybush is the natural alternative.

Honeybush vs rooibos

The two South African red bush teas, side by side:

	Honeybush	Rooibos
Plant	Cyclopia species	Aspalathus linearis
Origin	South African Cape (fynbos)	South African Cederberg
Caffeine	Naturally caffeine free	Naturally caffeine free
Tannin	Low	Low
Flavour character	Sweet, honey, floral	Slightly sweet, woody, nutty
Cup colour	Amber to red brown	Deep red amber
UK availability	Less common, specialty retailers	Widely available
Typical price	Slightly higher than rooibos	Affordable across brands

Both are excellent caffeine free options. For drinkers who want a sweeter profile, honeybush is the natural choice; for drinkers who prefer the slightly more savoury woody character of rooibos, rooibos is the better fit. Many drinkers enjoy both for variety; the rooibos and honeybush blend (combining both plants) is particularly popular.

For the wider rooibos context see the rooibos overview and the rooibos vs redbush comparison.

How to brew honeybush properly

Honeybush is one of the more flexible herbals to brew:

1. **Use freshly drawn cold water** brought to a rolling boil. Boiling water is appropriate
2. **Spoon in 1 to 2 teaspoons of dried honeybush** (if the honeybush is loose) or 1 tea bag in every 200ml cup
3. **Steep for 5 to 10 minutes:** longer brewing produces stronger character without bitterness
4. **Strain or remove the bag**
5. **No additional sweetener typically needed:** the natural sweetness is usually sufficient

6. **Drink hot or cold:** honeybush works equally well iced
7. **Re brew if loose leaf** gives 2 to 3 reasonable infusions

Water settings for honeybush and rooibos are in the water temperatures guide.

What honeybush offers

Honeybush is mostly enjoyed simply as a naturally sweet, caffeine-free cup, with a few gentle qualities:

- **Naturally caffeine free:** a good evening cup
- **Naturally sweet, low tannin:** a smooth cup that does not turn bitter and is easy to drink without sweetener
- **Antioxidant-rich:** contains polyphenols similar to rooibos

Its practical strength is being caffeine free and easy to drink in the evening; no further claims are made. Think of it as a pleasant everyday drink, nothing more.

What we stock

Browse the rooibos and red bush range. Honeybush containing products on teas.co.uk:

- Pukka Organic Rooibos & Honeybush, the classic combination of both South African red bush plants
- Teapigs Honeybush and Rooibos, whole leaf premium combination in pyramid bags

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

Where honeybush earns its place

Honeybush is the underappreciated South African red bush tea worth knowing about. The combination of natural honey sweetness, caffeine free status, smooth low tannin character, and broad versatility (hot or iced, neat or with milk) makes it one of the more pleasant additions to a herbal tea collection.

For drinkers who already enjoy rooibos, honeybush provides natural variation; the rooibos and honeybush blend is particularly popular as it combines both plants' characters. For drinkers wanting a naturally sweet caffeine free option without added sugar, honeybush is one of the better choices available.

Honeybush is harder to find in mainstream British shops than rooibos; specialist herbal retailers and South African importers offer the widest choice. For drinkers wanting accessible introduction, the rooibos honeybush blends from Pukka and Teapigs are the practical starting points.

Buying honeybush tea in the UK

Single ingredient honeybush is rare on British supermarket shelves; the typical UK route in is the rooibos and honeybush blend, which combines the two South African red bush plants into a single tea bag. The blend approach gives you both the woody depth of rooibos and the natural honey sweetness of honeybush in one cup, and is the practical introduction for most British drinkers. For pure single origin honeybush, the South African specialist importers and independent herbal shops are the places to look.

The teas.co.uk rooibos and red bush range sits within the wider herbal tea category; free UK delivery starts above £35, and the cost per cup shown on every product card lets you set one pack size or brand against another. Honeybush blends typically cost slightly more per cup than mainstream rooibos because the cultivation area is smaller and the global supply chain is shorter, but the per cup difference is usually within a penny or two.

Honeybush versus other naturally caffeine free options

- **Versus rooibos** the closest cousin; honeybush is sweeter and more floral, rooibos is woodier and slightly more savoury. Both are South African, both fynbos plants, both naturally caffeine free with low tannin.
- **Versus chamomile** both are gentle and caffeine free; chamomile leans honey floral with sleep evidence, honeybush leans honey sweet without specific sleep claims.
- **Versus peppermint** opposite ends of the herbal flavour spectrum; peppermint is bright and assertive, honeybush is mellow and sweet. Both work well as digestifs after meals.
- **Versus a fruit and flower herbal blend** honeybush gives you the natural sweetness without the tartness of berry blends; ideal for drinkers who want gentle sweetness without the fruit punch.
- **Versus a decaffeinated black tea** decaf still contains trace caffeine and is processed from *Camellia sinensis*; honeybush has no caffeine at all and comes from a different plant family entirely. See the decaf vs caffeine free comparison.

Frequently asked questions

Is honeybush tea safe during pregnancy? NHS advice during pregnancy is to have four cups of herbal tea daily at most, and to avoid blends containing liquorice root. Honeybush is caffeine free, but that does not make every herbal mix suitable, so a pharmacist or midwife can settle any doubt. As with any herbal, discuss heavy daily consumption with your midwife.

Can children drink honeybush? Age and dose guidance for children is not something we offer; a pharmacist, health visitor or GP can advise.

Does honeybush actually contain honey? No; the name comes from the honey like aroma of the flowering plant and the natural sweetness of the brewed cup, not from any honey ingredient. Suitable for vegans and for anyone avoiding bee products.

Why is honeybush less common than rooibos? The cultivation area is smaller, the wild harvested supply chain is more fragmented, and the global marketing push behind rooibos has been larger. Honeybush is the underrated cousin, not an inferior product, and many drinkers prefer it once they have tried both.

Can I add milk to honeybush? You can; honeybush takes milk well in the rooibos style, producing a creamy, mildly sweet, latte style cup. Equally good without milk.

Does honeybush have caffeine? No, zero caffeine. Suitable for evening drinking, pregnancy, children, and anyone avoiding caffeine. See the ultimate caffeine guide for the whole caffeine picture.

How long does honeybush keep? Stored in an airtight container away from light, heat, and moisture, honeybush keeps well for 18 to 24 months without significant flavour degradation. The low volatile nature of

the leaf makes it more storage tolerant than green or white tea.

Honeybush in the British tea cupboard

For most British drinkers, honeybush sits in the caffeine free evening rotation alongside rooibos, chamomile, and peppermint. The natural sweetness suits drinkers cutting back on sugar, and the cup is pleasant without any honey or sweetener added. For drinkers putting together a caffeine free kit, a sensible starting set includes rooibos, honeybush (or a rooibos honeybush blend), chamomile, peppermint, and one good bedtime blend. This five tea kit covers daytime, post meal, and evening caffeine free needs.

Pairing wise, honeybush works beautifully with mid morning biscuits, dark chocolate, and after dinner cheese; the natural honey sweetness complements rather than competes with these foods. For wider brand context see Pukka, Teapigs, Dragonfly, Clipper, and the wider teas.co.uk shop.

Teas in the related corner of the range: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. For more, the full tea shop ships free across the UK over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Match the tea to the moment. Honeybush belongs to the 4pm cup rather than the 6am one.

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