Tea Bag Brewing Tips

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tea bag brewing tips, in summary:** Tea bag brewing tips: fresh water at the right temperature, a timed steep, water onto the bag, and the squeeze debate settled.

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

Tea bag brewing has its own optimisation tips, proper water temperature, correct steep time, the squeeze vs don't squeeze debate, when to remove the bag. Small adjustments produce noticeably better cups from the same tea bag. Worth knowing.

The fundamentals

1. Use freshly drawn cold water

Re boiled water has lower dissolved oxygen, producing flatter cups. Boil fresh drawn water each time.

2. Use the right water temperature

- Black tea, herbal: full rolling boil (95-100°C).
- Oolong: just off boiling (90°C).
- Green tea: 75-80°C.
- White tea: 80-85°C.
- Matcha: 70-80°C (whisked, not steeped).

3. Pour water onto the bag, not bag into water

Forces immediate full contact with the dry leaves. Better extraction.

4. Steep for the right time

- Standard British black tea: 4 minutes.
- Earl Grey: 3-3½ minutes (don't oversteep).
- Green tea: 2-3 minutes.
- Herbal: 5-7 minutes.

5. Cover the cup or pot during steeping

Prevents volatile aromatic compounds escaping as steam. Especially important for herbal teas.

The squeeze vs don't squeeze debate

Common British practice is to squeeze the bag on the mug's side as you take it out.

Pro squeeze argument

Forces additional extraction; gets more value from the bag.

Anti squeeze argument

Excessive squeezing extracts bitter tannins from the spent leaves. Cup goes harsh.

Compromise

Brief gentle squeeze (2 seconds) is fine. Long aggressive squeezing produces bitter cups.

When to remove the bag

Remove at the end of the steep time. Leaving the bag in indefinitely:

- Continues extraction, eventually bitter
- Bag gets soggier; harder to remove cleanly
- Some bag materials slowly leach unwanted compounds (older paper bags)

The "stir during brewing" question

Stirring once during brewing helps extraction by moving water through the leaves. One gentle stir; not constant agitation.

Multiple bags for stronger tea

For "builder's tea" strength, use 2 bags per mug. Standard 1-bag per mug works for most preferences.

Pyramid bags vs flat bags

Pyramid bags (Twinings, Teapigs, some Pukka) provide more space for leaves to expand. Slightly better extraction. Premium priced. Note: most pyramid bags use PLA plant based plastic, industrial composting only.

Tea bag storage

Tea bags degrade with:

- Air exposure
- Light
- Heat
- Moisture
- Strong nearby odours

Keep in airtight original packaging (or transfer to airtight tin). Cool dark cupboard. Don't store above kettle. More on storage.

Brand specific brewing tips

Yorkshire Tea

4-5 minutes; full boil; milk and sugar to taste. Stir or briefly squeeze.

Earl Grey

3-3½ minutes ONLY. Don't oversteep, bergamot becomes acrid.

Green tea bags

75-80°C water; 2 minutes max. Don't use boiling water. The full method is in how to brew green tea.

Herbal infusions

5-7 minutes; cover the cup; full boil OK.

Common British brewing mistakes

- **Boiling water on green tea bags.** Bitter cup.
- **Brief steep on Yorkshire Tea.** Weak thin cup.
- **Re boiled kettle water.** Flatter cup.
- **Aggressive squeezing.** Bitter tannin extraction.
- **Forgetting the bag.** Stewed bitter cup.
- **Adding milk during brewing.** Stops proper extraction.
- **Not covering herbal teas.** Volatile aromatics escape.

The cold brew alternative

Cold brewed tea bags (4 bags + 1L cold water; fridge 6-8 hours) produces a smoother, less bitter cup than hot brewed. More on cold brew.

Reusing tea bags

Most British black tea bags don't yield a satisfying second infusion (CTC processing extracts everything quickly). Premium pyramid bags with whole leaf content sometimes give a weak second cup. Loose leaf is the format that really stands up to several infusions.

Tea bag composting

Modern UK plastic free tea bags (post-2018 transitions) are home compostable. Pyramid bags often require industrial composting. More on composting.

FAQ

How long should I steep a tea bag? 4 minutes for black tea; 2-3 minutes for green; 5-7 minutes for herbal.

Should I squeeze the bag? Brief gentle squeeze (2 seconds) is fine. Don't aggressively squeeze.

Can I reuse a tea bag? Most British CTC tea bags don't reuse well. Premium whole leaf pyramid bags sometimes yield a weak second cup.

Best water temperature? Depends on tea type. Black: boiling. Green: 75-80°C. Herbal: boiling.

Should I cover the cup during steeping? Yes for herbal teas (volatile aromatics). Optional for black tea.

Curator's note: tea bag brewing is the British daily driver routine. Most people on autopilot. A few small adjustments, proper temperature, correct steep time, fresh water, produce noticeably better cups. Worth thinking about. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

One change at a time

The fastest way to actually improve a bag cup is not to apply every tip at once but to change one variable and taste the result: drop the water off the boil for a green, or cut a stewed black from five minutes to four, or switch to freshly drawn water, and notice what each does. Bitter usually means too hot or too long; flat usually means reboiled water or under steeping; harsh usually means an aggressive squeeze. That single experimental habit, one change, taste, adjust, is the same lever not rule approach the how to make tea properly guide and the astringency guide teach, and it turns "my tea is a bit meh" into a fixable, understood thing rather than a mystery.

If you only change one thing, make it the water temperature: pouring a full boil over a green bag is the single commonest reason people decide they dislike green tea, when the bag was fine and the kettle was the problem. Off the boil for green and white, full boil for black and herbal, and most "this bag is rubbish" verdicts quietly disappear, the same brew to the leaf point the water temperature guide makes for loose leaf.

Bag brewing at a glance

Tea	Water	Steep
Black / herbal	Full boil (95 to 100C)	Black 4 min; herbal 5 to 7 min
Oolong	Just off boil (90C)	3 min
Green	75 to 80C	2 to 3 min
White	80 to 85C	2 to 3 min
Earl Grey	Full boil	3 to 3.5 min, do not over steep

Where bag brewing fits

None of this turns a dust grade bag into whole leaf, but it does get the best possible cup from the bag you have, which for most British households is the daily driver routine. The single biggest free upgrade is matching water temperature to the type, the universal rule the water temperature guide sets out, followed by a timed steep rather than a guessed one and freshly drawn water rather than reboiled, the same fundamentals the how to make tea properly guide and the best water for tea guide keep. If you want a real step change in the cup rather than the best version of a bag, that means moving to loose leaf, the case the

loose leaf versus tea bags guide makes, with a roomy basket as set out in infuser versus strainer.

Buy a better everyday cup

Good technique gets the best from a bag; better leaf gets a better cup. Browse everyday black tea, the loose leaf range or a breakfast blend at teas.co.uk, or the full tea shop. With bags or leaf, buy by the cup and description, check what each cup costs, and know UK delivery is free over £35.

Where this fits in the wider 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 · Your taste, not the shelf, should pick the teabag. Curiosity is the only reliable guide.

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