

Best Instant Coffee UK

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

Best instant coffee, in summary: The best instant coffee in the UK, ranked by tier from supermarket basics to speciality freeze dried, plus decaf options and how to make a better cup.

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for instant coffee, UK coffee brands, or "Best Tea Shops in the UK". Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/best-instant-coffee-uk/>*

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

"Why does a tea website sell coffee?" Fair question. The most British households drink both. We sell coffee from the same independent perspective we apply to tea, what's actually good, what's overpriced, and what tastes like burnt cardboard regardless of price. This is the working guide to instant coffee in the UK from a tea person who drinks coffee too.

Why instant coffee gets a bad rap

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Why instant coffee gets a bad rap, Best Instant Coffee UK. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/best-instant-coffee-uk/>*

Speciality coffee culture loves to dunk on instant. Some of the criticism is fair (mass market freeze dried robusta is genuinely poor) and some is snobbery (modern premium instants are dramatically better than 20 years ago). The truth: there's a wide quality range. £2-a jar [supermarket](#) basics are not what £8-a jar speciality instants are. Don't write the category off because of the bottom shelf.

How instant coffee is made (briefly)

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for How instant coffee is made (briefly), Best Instant Coffee UK. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/best-instant-coffee-uk/>*

Two main methods:

- **Spray drying.** Brewed coffee is sprayed into hot air. Water evaporates instantly, leaving fine powder. Cheaper, faster, slightly more flavour loss.

- **Freeze drying.** Brewed coffee is frozen, then water is sublimated under vacuum. Slower, more expensive, better aromatic preservation. Most premium instant uses freeze drying.

Both methods produce a soluble powder that reconstitutes in hot water. The bean quality and brewing method before drying matter as much as the dehydration method itself.

The UK instant coffee tiers

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The UK instant coffee tiers, Best Instant Coffee UK. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/best-instant-coffee-uk/>*

Bottom tier (£2-3 per 100g)

Supermarket own brand. Mostly robusta beans, spray dried. Bitter, flat, sometimes ashy. Functional [caffeine delivery](#), not a pleasant cup.

Examples: Tesco Value Instant, Sainsbury's Basics Instant, ASDA Smart Price Instant. Avoid unless price is the only consideration.

Mid tier (£4-6 per 100g)

The volume British market. Mainstream brands using mostly robusta, often blended with some arabica. Spray dried or freeze dried. Recognisable, drinkable, not exceptional.

Examples: Nescafé Original, Nescafé Gold Blend, Kenco Smooth, Maxwell House. The everyday standard.

Mid premium tier (£6-9 per 100g)

Premium freeze dried blends, often higher arabica content, sometimes single origin. Noticeably better than mid tier in cup smoothness and aroma. The sweet spot for daily driver instant.

Examples: Nescafé Azera, Kenco Millicano, Lyons Kenyan Arabica, Carte Noire (French brand, widely available in UK).

Speciality tier (£10-30+ per 100g)

Single origin freeze dried instants from speciality coffee brands. Made from fresh roasted beans, premium drying processes, often in small batches. Some genuinely rival a pour over coffee.

Examples: Sudden Coffee (US, available online), Mount Hagen Organic, Waka Coffee, ARTISAN Coffee Co. instants, Joe Black instant pods, Wandering Bear cold brew (technically liquid concentrate but in the same category).

What we stock and why

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for What we stock and why, Best Instant Coffee UK. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/best-instant-coffee-uk/>*

The teas.co.uk coffee range follows the same principle as our tea range: independent and characterful, not just supermarket repeats. We carry brands that wouldn't normally land in a supermarket aisle, small roastery instants, single origin freeze dried, and decaf options that don't taste like tar.

Decaf instant coffee

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Decaf instant coffee, Best Instant Coffee UK. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/best-instant-coffee-uk/*

Decaf instant has historically been worse than caffeinated instant, the decaffeination process strips some flavour compounds along with the caffeine. Modern CO₂-process decaf has narrowed the gap considerably.

- **Nescafé Gold Blend Decaf.** Mainstream baseline. Reasonable.
- **Kenco Decaf.** Comparable to Nescafé Gold Decaf. Different flavour profile.
- **Mount Hagen Organic Decaf.** Specialty option. Cleaner cup. CO₂-process decaffeination.
- **Carte Noire Décaféiné.** French style decaf, slightly richer than UK mainstream.

Caffeine in instant coffee

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Caffeine in instant coffee, Best Instant Coffee UK. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/best-instant-coffee-uk/*

Per teaspoon (1.8g), brewed in 200ml water:

- Standard instant: 60-80mg caffeine
- "Strong" instant or double teaspoon: 100-150mg
- Decaf instant: 2-5mg

Roughly comparable to filter coffee on a per cup basis, lower than espresso, higher than most tea.

How to make better instant coffee

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for How to make better instant coffee, Best Instant Coffee UK. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/best-instant-coffee-uk/*

Most instant coffee is ruined at the cup making stage:

1. **Use water just off boiling, not boiling.** Boiling water scalds coffee compounds. 90-92°C is ideal.
2. **Stir vigorously for 15 seconds.** Fully dissolves the granules; reduces "puddle" of undissolved coffee at the bottom.
3. **Use a slightly heaped teaspoon.** Most jars suggest "1 level tsp"; a slightly heaped tsp produces a noticeably better cup.
4. **Bloom the coffee (premium instants only).** Add a splash of hot water to the powder, stir to a paste, then add the rest. Releases more aromatics. Worth doing for £6+ instants; not needed for basics.
5. **Add milk after, not before.** Adding milk before the coffee dissolves can cause clumping.
6. **Don't reuse old jars indefinitely.** Instant coffee oxidises slowly. 3-6 months after opening for peak flavour.

Instant coffee vs filter vs espresso vs pod

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Method	Cup quality	Time	Cost per cup
Cheap instant	2/10	30 sec	£0.05
Mid instant (Gold Blend)	5/10	30 sec	£0.08
Premium instant	7/10	1 min	£0.20
Filter (machine)	7/10	5 min	£0.15
Pour over (V60)	9/10	5 min	£0.30
Espresso (machine)	9/10	2 min	£0.20
Pod (Nespresso)	7/10	30 sec	£0.40

FAQ

Best instant coffee UK? Mid premium tier: Nescafé Azera, Kenco Millicano, Lyons Kenyan Arabica. Speciality tier: Mount Hagen Organic, ARTISAN Coffee Co.

Why is supermarket instant so bitter? Mostly robusta beans, spray dried, often over extracted at the brewing stage before drying. Higher arabica content and freeze drying make a big difference.

Does instant coffee have less caffeine? Per cup, roughly equivalent to filter coffee. Per gram of coffee, similar.

Can I make filter quality coffee with instant? Premium freeze dried specialty instant gets surprisingly close. Mainstream instant doesn't.

Why does teas.co.uk sell coffee? Most UK households drink both. We bring the same independent specialist eye to coffee as we do to tea, what's actually good, regardless of marketing.

Curator's note: I drink [Yorkshire Gold](#) in the morning and a cup of Mount Hagen Organic mid afternoon when the coffee mood hits. Tea and coffee aren't rivals, they're different tools for different parts of the day. Lee, Teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Quick take

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Quick take, Best Instant Coffee UK. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/best-instant-coffee-uk/*

Instant coffee deserves its bad reputation only at the bottom shelf; modern mid premium and speciality freeze dried is dramatically better. Skip the two pound robusta jars, treat Nescafé Gold and Kenco as the everyday standard, and step to Azera, Millicano or a single origin speciality jar for a genuinely good cup. Brew it off boil, stir hard, use a heaped spoon, bloom the premium jars. Decaf has narrowed the gap with CO2 processing. Tea and coffee are tools for different parts of the day, not rivals.

From the same independent shelf: browse the [coffee range](#), or the tea side, everyday black from [Yorkshire Tea](#), organic from [Pukka](#), or premium from [Teapigs](#). See also the [caffeine guide](#) and [best decaf guide](#).

References cited

- [EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine \(2015\)](#)
- [NHS guidance on caffeine](#)

If you want the shopping shortlist: [English Breakfast](#), [Earl Grey](#), [green tea](#), [loose leaf tea](#), [Darjeeling](#), [oolong](#), and [herbal tea](#). Find more in the [tea shop](#); UK delivery is free over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR teas · Per-cup price is the only price that matters. Loose leaf usually wins; supermarket bags sometimes do too.

Shop the topic

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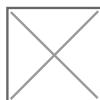
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