Tea Blending

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tea blending, in summary:** Tea blending is the invisible craft that keeps a brand tasting the same year on year despite varying harvests. How blends are built, and why.

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

Tea blending is the often invisible craft that produces consistent flavour from year to year despite varying harvest conditions. A typical English Breakfast contains 5-15 different teas from multiple regions, blended by master blenders who taste hundreds of cups daily. The work is closer to wine making than to industrial mixing.

Why tea is blended

Three reasons:

1. Consistency

Tea is an agricultural product. Each harvest varies in flavour based on weather, soil conditions, and processing. A consumer expects their morning tea to taste the same as last year's. Blenders adjust ratios and sources to maintain consistent character despite raw material variation.

2. Building specific flavours

No single origin tea provides every desired characteristic. English Breakfast wants Assam's malty backbone + Ceylon's brightness + Kenyan's strength + sometimes Chinese Keemun's softness. Blending combines these into one cup.

3. Cost management

Premium estate teas are expensive. Blending allows lower cost teas to be combined with smaller portions of premium teas to produce a balanced cup at a sustainable price.

The master blender role

Master blenders at major tea companies:

- Taste 100-300 cups of tea daily
- Maintain mental databases of every available tea source

- Develop and adjust recipes for each branded blend
- Make final decisions on which teas enter which blends
- Train apprentice tasters

At Taylors of Harrogate (Yorkshire Tea), Twinings, Tetley, the master blender is a senior position with significant influence over the final cup.

The tasting process

Standard tea tasting protocol:

1. Brew samples in identical small vessels (3g of tea in 150ml water, 5 minutes).
2. Pour into white porcelain bowls.
3. Slurp loudly to aerate (forces tea across all parts of the palate).
4. Spit out (you can't drink 200 cups).
5. Take notes on body, brightness, malt, briskness, etc.
6. Compare against the brand's "standard", the reference blend.

Master blenders maintain palate sensitivity through years of training. Experienced blenders can distinguish between teas from estates only kilometres apart.

What's in a typical blend

English Breakfast

- 40-60% Assam (body, malt, caffeine)
- 20-40% Ceylon (brightness, balance)
- 10-20% Kenyan (strength, colour)
- 0-10% Chinese (sometimes Keemun for refinement)

Earl Grey

- Black tea base (often Ceylon led)
- Bergamot oil flavouring

Yorkshire Gold

- Premium Assam (heavier proportion)
- Premium Ceylon
- Premium Kenyan / Rwandan
- Sometimes premium Indonesian

Blending vs single origin

Approach	Pros	Cons

Blended	Consistent year to year, balanced cup, reliable	Less character expression of any single tea
Single origin	Distinct character, terroir expression, premium experience	Variable year to year, more expensive, harder to source

Most British tea drinking is blended (Yorkshire, PG Tips, Twinings). Single origin tea drinking is the specialty / connoisseur tier, Darjeeling estates, single estate Ceylon, single mountain Yunnan.

Adjusting for harvest variation

If a particular Assam estate has a poor year (drought, pest damage):

- Blender may reduce its proportion in the blend.
- Substitute with another Assam source.
- Adjust supporting teas (slightly more Ceylon for brightness if Assam is weaker).
- Final cup matches reference standard despite changed inputs.

This invisible adjustment is why drinkers rarely notice harvest year variation in major brand teas. The blender absorbs the variation.

Flavoured tea blending

Adding flavours (bergamot, fruit, vanilla, spices) is technically blending too:

- **Spray applied oils.** Bergamot for Earl Grey; flavour oils for fruit teas.
- **Dried piece blending.** Fruit pieces, peel, flowers mixed in.
- **Layered scenting.** Tea layered with fresh flowers (jasmine, rose) for hours/days.

Buying blends vs single origin

- **Daily drinking:** Blends are practical, cheaper, consistent. Yorkshire, Tetley, Twinings.
- **Tasting / appreciation:** Single origin worth exploring. Darjeeling estates, Ceylon estates, Chinese specialty.
- **Mixed cupboard:** Most serious drinkers keep both.

FAQ

What is tea blending? Combining teas from multiple sources to produce a consistent, balanced cup.

Is blended tea worse than single origin? Different, not worse. Blends prioritise consistency; single origin prioritises character.

How many teas in a typical blend? 5-15 different sources for major commercial blends.

What does a master blender do? Tastes hundreds of cups daily, develops and maintains brand recipes, ensures consistency despite harvest variation.

Can I blend my own tea at home? Yes, a useful starting point is mixing two teas you already enjoy (e.g. Yorkshire Tea + Earl Grey for "stronger Earl Grey"). Experimental, not industrial.

Curator's note: tea blending is one of those invisible crafts that keeps your favourite brand tasting like itself year after year. The master blender's work is real skill, closer to winemaking than to industrial mixing. Worth knowing about, even if you never see the results directly. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Blending your own at home

The home version is low stakes and really useful: start by mixing two teas you already like in small measured spoons, a strong English Breakfast stretched with a little Earl Grey for a fuller bergamot cup, or a brisk base softened with a gentler one, tasting and adjusting the ratio as a blender would against their standard. It is experimental rather than industrial, but it teaches the core idea fast, that a balanced cup is built, not found. Compare a house blend against a single garden side by side from the full black tea range and the difference between consistency and character becomes obvious in a sitting.

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