Brewing Green Tea Without the Bitterness

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Brewing green tea, in summary:** Give green tea water that has cooled a little from the boil, and keep the steep short. The temperature, ratio and timing that turn bitter green tea into a clean, sweet cup.

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

Most British drinkers ruin green tea by treating it like Yorkshire Tea, boiling water, 4-minute steep, sometimes milk. The result is bitter, harsh, and gives green tea a bad reputation it doesn't deserve. Brewed correctly, water below boiling, short steep, no milk, green tea is sweet, fresh, and one of the most rewarding daily drinks. This is the working brewing guide.

The two key rules

Rule 1: Water temperature 75-80°C, NOT boiling.

Boiling water bitters green tea by over extracting catechins and tannins. Premium green teas (Japanese sencha, gyokuro) are particularly heat sensitive. Hard rule: take the kettle off, wait 2-3 minutes, THEN pour over the leaves.

Rule 2: Steep 2-3 minutes maximum.

Past 3 minutes, bitterness develops fast. Most aromatic and L theanine extraction happens in the first 90 seconds.

The detailed brewing protocol

For loose leaf green tea

1. 1 heaped teaspoon (~2.5g) of leaves per 200ml.
2. Use a variable temperature kettle set to 75-80°C, or boil water and check with a thermometer as it cools.
3. Pour water over the leaves in a teapot or infuser.
4. Steep 2-3 minutes (longer for darker greens like gunpowder, shorter for delicate greens like gyokuro).
5. Strain. Strain, then drink it without milk or with a slice of lemon.

For tea bags

1. 1 bag per 200ml.
2. Same temperature (75-80°C, not boiling).
3. Steep 2-3 minutes.
4. Remove the bag promptly.

Temperature targets by green tea type

Green tea	Temperature	Steep time
Gyokuro (premium shaded)	50-60°C	2 minutes
Sencha (Japanese)	70-80°C	1-2 minutes
Long Jing / Bi Luo Chun (Chinese)	75-85°C	2-3 minutes
Gunpowder green	80-85°C	2-3 minutes
Genmaicha	80-85°C	1-2 minutes
Hojicha (roasted)	90-95°C	1-2 minutes
Bagged supermarket green	80°C	2-3 minutes

The "right water" methods

Method 1: Variable temperature kettle

Most precise. Set to 80°C, brew immediately. Fellow Stagg, Cuisinart, and several other brands offer reasonably priced variable temperature kettles.

Method 2: Boil and cool

1. Boil the kettle.
2. Pour boiled water into the teapot or another vessel (it loses some heat in the transfer).
3. Check with a thermometer until it is down to about 80°C; how long that takes depends on the amount of water and the vessel.
4. Pour over the leaves.

Method 3: Cold water dilution

Pour ~90% boiling water + ~10% cold water = approximately 85°C. Quick and works without specialised equipment.

Multiple infusions

Premium green tea can be steeped multiple times:

- **Sencha:** 2-3 infusions. First infusion 1-2 minutes; subsequent 30-60 seconds.
- **Gyokuro:** 3-4 infusions. Each at low temperature.

- **Long Jing:** 2-3 infusions.
- **Gunpowder:** 3-4 infusions; pellets unfurl across the brews.

What NOT to do

- **Don't add milk.** Milk proteins bind to catechins, reducing flavour and bioavailability.
- **Don't add sugar.** Pure green tea has natural sweetness when brewed properly. Sugar masks the cup's character.
- **Don't oversteep.** 4+ minutes makes the cup harsh.
- **Don't use boiling water.** Single biggest mistake.
- **Don't reheat brewed green tea.** Re heating develops off flavours rapidly.

The "but I don't have a thermometer" reality

For everyday brewing, the boil then wait method works fine. Boil the kettle, pour into the teapot, wait while you put the dishes away, THEN brew. About 2-3 minutes of cooling produces drinkable green tea. Don't over engineer the process.

Cold brewing, different approach

Cold brewed green tea (4 bags in 1L cold water, fridge 6-8 hours) produces a smoother, less bitter, naturally sweet cup. Excellent for summer iced drinking. More on cold brew.

Common mistakes in detail

"My green tea is bitter"

Almost certainly: water too hot or steeped too long. Lower temperature to 75°C and shorten to 2 minutes.

"My green tea is weak"

Either too few leaves (use 1 heaped tsp per 200ml) or too short steep (try 3 minutes instead of 2).

"My green tea tastes 'off'"

Tea may be stale (replace within 6-12 months of opening). Or your water has off flavour (try filtered).

"My green tea tastes flat"

Likely commodity grade leaves. Premium green tea (single origin sencha, Long Jing) has dramatically more character than supermarket bags.

FAQ

What temperature for green tea? 75-80°C, NOT boiling.

How long to steep green tea? 2-3 minutes for most types.

Why is my green tea bitter? Water too hot or steeped too long.

Can I add milk to green tea? Don't, milk binds catechins and dulls flavour.

Best green tea for daily brewing? Pukka Pure Green or Clipper Pure Green for organic accessible. Specialist sencha or Long Jing for premium daily.

Curator's note: green tea brewed properly tastes nothing like green tea brewed wrong. The temperature shift from 100°C to 80°C is the single biggest improvement most British drinkers can make to their tea drinking. Try it once, properly, and you'll never go back. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Choosing the leaf, and where to go next

The single biggest improvement most British drinkers can make is the temperature drop from boiling to around 80C, but it only pays off on a green worth the care, so start with a quality whole leaf green tea explained such as a Mao Feng or sencha rather than dusty bags. Brewed properly it tastes nothing like green tea brewed wrong, and that is a leaf and method point, not a brand one. Browse suitable greens in the green tea range, premium whole leaf from Teapigs, or compare across the full tea shop.

Reference noted

- PubMed: L-theanine and attention (clinical trial)

Shopping notes for this topic: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. The full tea shop is open for browsing, and UK delivery is free once the order passes £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

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- Green tea
- Ideal water temperatures
- Common brewing mistakes
- How to make tea properly

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