# Chamomile: The Plant, Flowers and Species

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Chamomile the plant, in summary:** Chamomile the plant: the apple scented daisy used for 2,000 years, where it grows, the two species, and what the evening cup actually does for you.

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

**Chamomile is the small white and yellow daisy that's been brewed as a bedtime infusion across Europe for at least 2,000 years.** Egyptian, Greek, and Roman writings mention it. Medieval European herbalists used it widely. The modern UK supermarket shelf carries five or six versions of it. The cup is gentle, slightly apple scented, and one of the most familiar caffeine free herbal teas on the shelf.

## Where chamomile grows

German chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*), the standard tea bag chamomile, grows wild across Europe, the Near East, and parts of Asia. It's a hardy annual that tolerates poor soil and drought. The plant produces small flowers (about 2cm across) with white petals around a yellow conical centre. The flower heads are picked at peak bloom, dried in shade or low temperature ovens, and either packaged whole or cut for tea bags.

Major commercial growing regions: Egypt, Hungary, Croatia, Argentina, and parts of Eastern Europe. Egyptian chamomile is often considered the gold standard for aromatic intensity.

## The flower itself

Chamomile flowers smell sweetly of apples, the genus name "Matricaria" relates to the Latin *matrix* (womb), referring to traditional uses. The "chamomile" name comes from Greek *khamaim?lon* ("earth apple"), again referencing the apple like aroma, as does the Spanish *manzanilla* ("little apple").

The whole dried flower is more aromatic than the chopped tea bag version. Cellular damage from cutting accelerates the loss of volatile compounds, which is why loose chamomile beats tea bags on flavour.

## Traditional uses across cultures

- **Ancient Egypt.** Used in cosmetics and offered to the sun god Ra. Mummies have been found wreathed in chamomile.
- **Ancient Greece.** Hippocrates wrote about chamomile.
- **Roman era.** Pliny the Elder catalogued it.
- **Medieval Europe.** One of the "Nine Sacred Herbs" of Anglo Saxon herbal tradition. Used as a strewing herb in churches and homes.
- **Modern UK.** Supermarket bedtime tea staple. Beatrix Potter's Mrs Rabbit famously gave Peter Rabbit chamomile tea after his garden adventure.

## The two species

### German chamomile (Matricaria chamomilla)

The dominant tea bag chamomile. Annual plant, small flowers, hollow conical receptacle. Grows tall (60-90cm). Higher chamazulene content than Roman chamomile, which is why German chamomile essential oil is famously deep blue.

### Roman chamomile (Chamaemelum nobile)

Perennial, lower growing (10-30cm), used more in essential oils and lawn cover than tea. Slightly different aromatic profile, sweeter, less assertive than German. Some specialist tea blends use Roman chamomile for a softer cup.

## Chamomile in cosmetics and skincare

Chamomile extract is widely used in skincare for its bisabolol content, baby shampoos, after sun creams, redness reducing serums. Topical use is far better evidenced than ingested tea for skin, drinking chamomile won't transform your skin.

## How to brew loose chamomile properly

Loose whole flowers produce a noticeably better cup than tea bags.

1. 1-2 teaspoons of dried whole flowers per 200ml.
2. Just off boiling water (~95°C).
3. Cover the cup or teapot. The aromatic compounds escape as steam, covering captures them.
4. Steep 5-7 minutes for a proper cup.
5. Strain. Optionally sweeten with honey, brighten with lemon.

## Common chamomile blends

- **Chamomile + lavender.** Twinings Lavender & Chamomile. Sleep leaning. Lavender adds floral depth.
- **Chamomile + honey.** Bee related branding. Gentle, sweet.
- **Chamomile + spearmint.** Bedtime tea staple. Mint adds brightness without caffeine.
- **Chamomile + lemon.** Citrus brightness. Often marketed as morning friendly.

- **Three Chamomile (Pukka).** Multiple chamomile species blended for richness.
- **Pukka Night Time.** Chamomile + valerian + oat flower + lavender. The bigger guns of bedtime tea.

### Buying chamomile

- For tea bags: Pukka Three Chamomile or Clipper Organic.
- For loose: specialist UK suppliers carry whole flower Egyptian chamomile.
- For sleep blends: Pukka Night Time or Twinings Sleep blend.
- Caffeine free across the board.

### Cautions

- **Allergies.** Chamomile is in the same family as ragweed and daisies, cross allergic reactions are uncommon but real. First time drinkers should start small.
- **Medication, pregnancy and children.** Chamomile can interact with some medications, including blood thinners. If you take regular medication, are pregnant or breastfeeding, or are buying for young children, check with a pharmacist or GP before drinking it regularly.

### FAQ

**What does chamomile taste like?** Sweet, slightly apple like, mildly floral. Gentle. Not bitter unless over brewed.

**Is chamomile caffeine free?** Yes. 0mg caffeine per cup.

**Can I drink chamomile every day?** Yes, 1-3 cups daily is generally fine for most adults.

**Best chamomile UK?** Pukka Three Chamomile or specialist Egyptian whole flower loose chamomile.

**Difference between German and Roman chamomile?** German is the standard tea bag chamomile; Roman is sweeter, lower growing, used more in essential oils. Cup level differences are subtle.

*Curator's note: chamomile is the most reliably good entry level herbal tea. Cheap, widely available, gentle enough for kids, and properly brewed it lives up to its promise as a quiet evening drink. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.*

### The two chamomile species, at a glance

| Species | Plant | Cup and use |
|---|---|---|
| German chamomile | Matricaria chamomilla, hardy annual | sweet, apple like; the standard tea bag flower with the strongest research base |
| Roman chamomile | Chamaemelum nobile, perennial | larger flower, more bitter and complex; more often essential oil than tea |

For a supermarket cup you are almost always drinking German chamomile. What changes the cup far more than the species is freshness and form: whole dried flowers hold their apple sweet character better than the cut tea bag grade. For the consumer guide to products and brewing see the full chamomile tea guide, and

for the bedtime angle chamomile and sleep. Buy a pure chamomile such as Twinings Pure Camomile, an organic one via Pukka, or the full tea shop.

FROM THE CURATOR

*teas* · Pick what you'll actually drink every day. The chamomile you make on a Tuesday counts for more than the species you read about.

### Chamomile companion reading

- Chamomile tea, the full guide
- Chamomile and sleep
- Herbal tea overview
- Caffeine free teas

### More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
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