Cooking With Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Cooking with tea, in summary:** Cooking with tea: tea smoked salmon, Earl Grey shortbread, Lapsang braises, chai rice pudding. The four ways tea enters food and recipes that work.

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

Cooking with tea is one of the most overlooked techniques in the home kitchen. Tea smoked salmon, Earl Grey ice cream, matcha biscuits, Lapsang Souchong braising liquid, chai infused rice pudding, all serious dishes built around the kind of tea you've already got in the cupboard. This is the practical guide to cooking with tea: which teas suit which dishes, how to extract flavour without bitterness, and recipes that actually work.

The four ways tea enters food

1. Brewed liquid (steeping into other liquids)

Brew tea strong, then use the liquid as a flavour base. Examples: tea poached pears, Earl Grey crème brûlée, chai infused custard. The tea becomes a flavour carrying liquid the way stock does.

2. Ground or powdered (matcha, finely milled)

Matcha and other powdered teas can be incorporated directly into batters, doughs, ice cream, and custards. The whole leaf is consumed. Best for sweet preparations where the green colour and slight bitterness are features.

3. Whole leaves (smoking, infusing)

Tea leaves heated in a sealed pan release smoke that flavours protein. Tea smoked duck and tea smoked salmon are classic Chinese techniques. The leaves themselves get discarded.

4. Dry rub (ground tea as seasoning)

Ground tea mixed with salt, sugar, and spices forms a dry rub for meats. Lapsang Souchong rubs for steak; Earl Grey rubs for chicken. The tea contributes both flavour and a subtle textural element.

The four routes, at a glance

Route	How	Best teas
Infusing liquid	strong tea instead of water or stock for grains, pulses, poaching	jasmine, green, spiced black, hibiscus
Dry ingredient	matcha or ground leaf in shortbread, cakes, biscuits	matcha, finely ground black
Smoking agent	smoulder tea, rice and sugar to smoke food	black, Lapsang Souchong
Marinade / braise	tannins tenderise and flavour meat and tofu	strong black, smoky Lapsang

Best teas for cooking

Earl Grey (bergamot black)

Sweet baking, biscuits, cakes, ice cream, panna cotta. The bergamot oil survives moderate heat and produces a distinctive perfumed citrus character. Earl Grey shortbread is a classic Sussex tearoom recipe.

Lapsang Souchong (smoked black)

Savoury cooking, meat rubs, braising liquids, smoke infused soups. Replaces actual smoking in some dishes. A teaspoon of Lapsang in a beef stew adds barbecue depth without firing up a smoker.

Matcha (Japanese green powder)

Sweet preparations, biscuits, cakes, ice cream, milk drinks, custard. The grass green colour and slight bitterness pair well with white chocolate, cream, and vanilla. More on matcha here.

Chai (spiced black)

Rice pudding, baked French toast, oatmeal/porridge, custards. The spice mix integrates beautifully with milk based desserts. Chai spiced poached pears are exceptional.

Genmaicha (toasted rice green tea)

Savoury rice dishes, miso soup variants, dashi style broths. The toasted rice character provides umami depth.

Hojicha (roasted green tea)

Sweet preparations needing a coffee like roasted note without caffeine impact. Hojicha latte, hojicha tiramisu, hojicha ice cream.

Black tea (everyday Yorkshire, English Breakfast)

Tea poached fruit (especially prunes and figs), tea soaked dried fruit for cakes (Bara Brith Welsh tea loaf), tea braised pork.

Green tea (sencha, gunpowder)

Tea poached fish, green tea rice (used as cooking liquid), salad dressings (with sesame oil).

Five recipes that actually work

1. Earl Grey shortbread

- 225g butter, 100g sugar, 350g flour, 2 tea bags' worth of finely ground Earl Grey leaves (open the bags and grind in a spice mill or mortar).
- Cream butter and sugar. Add flour and ground tea. Form a log; chill 1 hour.
- Slice into rounds; bake at 160°C for 12-15 minutes.
- The bergamot perfumes the kitchen during baking.

2. Tea poached pears

- 4 firm pears, peeled, cored from base.
- Brew 800ml strong black tea (4 bags). Add 150g sugar, a stick of cinnamon, 4 cloves, peel of one lemon.
- Simmer pears in the tea for 25-30 minutes until tender.
- Cool in the liquid. Serve with cream or vanilla ice cream.

3. Lapsang Souchong rubbed steak

- 2 tbsp Lapsang leaves, ground fine in a spice mill.
- 1 tsp salt, 1 tsp brown sugar, 1 tsp cracked pepper, ½ tsp smoked paprika.
- Mix and rub onto a thick cut steak 30 minutes before cooking.
- Sear in a hot pan; finish in a hot oven. The smoky flavour comes through clearly and surprises most people.

4. Matcha biscuits

- 200g butter, 100g sugar, 1 egg, 250g flour, 2 tbsp culinary matcha, ½ tsp baking powder.
- Cream butter and sugar; add egg; fold in flour and matcha.
- Roll into balls; flatten; bake at 170°C for 12-14 minutes.
- The biscuits are vivid green and slightly bitter, pair with white chocolate chunks for balance.

5. Chai porridge

- 200ml milk + 100ml water + 1 chai tea bag (torn open) + 4 tbsp porridge oats + a pinch of salt.
- Simmer 5 minutes. The chai spices flavour the entire bowl.
- Sweeten with brown sugar or honey. Top with chopped nuts and dried fruit.

Tea smoking technique

Tea smoking indoors is quite doable in a regular kitchen with a heavy lidded wok or a foil lined roasting tin.

1. Line a wok or deep pan with foil. Mix 4 tbsp loose Lapsang Souchong + 2 tbsp brown sugar + 2 tbsp uncooked rice + a stick of cinnamon. Spread on the foil.
2. Sit a steamer rack above the foil. Place protein (salmon fillet, duck breast, chicken breast) on the rack.

3. Cover tightly with the lid (use foil to seal gaps if necessary).
4. Heat over medium high. The mixture starts smoking within 3-4 minutes.
5. Smoke 8-12 minutes depending on protein thickness.
6. Remove from heat; let sit covered for another 5 minutes.
7. The protein picks up a real smoky flavour, a little sweet from the sugar and layered from the tea.

Open windows. Turn on extractor fan. Smoke escapes during the process even with a tight lid.

Common mistakes

- **Brewing tea too long for cooking.** Bitter tea = bitter dish. Brew at the same time/temperature you'd use for drinking.
- **Adding ground tea late.** Tea grounds in batter can stay crunchy. Grind very fine (spice mill) for smooth incorporation.
- **Using tea bags without opening.** Tear them open, the bag fabric leaches odd flavours during long cooking.
- **Using flavoured tea bags with milk powder or sugar.** Don't substitute chai concentrate sachets for chai tea bags in cooking, the milk powder fouls everything.

FAQ

Can I bake with tea? Yes. Earl Grey, matcha, and chai work especially well in baking.

What's the best tea for cooking meat? Lapsang Souchong for smoky character; black tea for braising liquids; Earl Grey for sweet glazes.

Does cooking break down tea's catechins and flavonoids? Heat reduces some catechin and flavonoid content. Don't cook with tea for traditional uses, cook with it for flavour.

Best tea infused dessert? Earl Grey ice cream, matcha tiramisu, or chai spiced rice pudding are reliable favourites.

Can I tea smoke at home? Yes, a heavy wok with a tight lid works. Open windows and use the extractor fan.

Curator's note: cooking with tea looks fancy but is actually easy. Earl Grey shortbread takes 20 minutes from cupboard to oven and tastes like something out of a Notting Hill tearoom. Worth experimenting with whatever tea you've got. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Pick a cooking-suitable tea, smoky Lapsang, perfumed Earl Grey or vivid matcha, from the full tea shop, with free UK delivery over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · In the kitchen too, one good loose leaf tea used with care beats five exotic bags used in

a rush.

Cooking-side companion reading

- Cooking with tea, the underused ingredient
- Lapsang Souchong
- Earl Grey reference
- Black tea

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

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