Elderflower Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Elderflower tea, in summary:** Elderflower tea is a caffeine-free British hedgerow infusion: delicately floral, woven into folk herbalism for colds. Comfort, not a treatment, and how to brew it.

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

Elderflower is the British hedgerow's most distinctive aromatic, a delicate, lightly sweet, almost grape like floral note that defines summer in the UK countryside. The flowers of the elder tree (*Sambucus nigra*) are dried for tea, infused for cordial, made into wine, and used in herbal medicine. The cup is gentle, sweet, naturally caffeine free, and one of the most quintessentially British herbal teas.

The plant

Elder (*Sambucus nigra*) is a small to medium tree native across Europe and the British Isles. It produces:

- **Cream white flower clusters in late spring and early summer (May June).** The "elderflowers" used for tea, cordial, and wine.
- **Dark purple berries in autumn (August September).** The "elderberries" used for syrups, jams, and cold season products.

The wood, leaves, and bark are mildly toxic when fresh, only the flowers and ripe cooked berries are safe for consumption.

Where elderflower fits in British herbalism

Elderflower has a long British folk medicine tradition:

- **Cold and flu.** Hot elderflower tea with honey is a classic British cold season drink. Some traditional sources combine it with peppermint and yarrow.
- **Hayfever.** Anecdotal traditional use. Some weak clinical evidence.
- **Skin conditions.** Traditional use as a face wash and bath additive.
- **Diuretic.** Mild traditional diuretic effect.

The clinical evidence for these traditional uses is mostly weak, none rises to the level of solid trial data. Elderflower tea is a pleasant gentle drink with mild possible benefits, not a treatment.

What elderflower tastes like

Light, floral, slightly sweet, with a distinctive grape like aromatic note. The cup is pale gold. Less assertive than chamomile, less aromatic than lavender. Drinks beautifully cold brewed in summer with a slice of lemon.

What's in a typical elderflower tea bag

- Dried elderflower (the dominant ingredient)
- Sometimes blended with: chamomile, lemon balm, peppermint, lemongrass, rosehip, hibiscus
- Pure elderflower teas exist; blends are more common in mainstream UK retail

Common elderflower blends

- **Elderflower + lemon balm.** Mellow, citrussy.
- **Elderflower + chamomile.** Sleep leaning blend.
- **Elderflower + echinacea.** Cold and flu blend.
- **Elderflower + apple.** Fruity, sweet, family friendly.
- **Elderflower + rosehip.** Bright, vitamin C contributing.
- **Pukka Elderberry & Echinacea.** Cold season blend.

How to brew

1. 1 tea bag per 200ml (or 2 tsp dried elderflower for loose).
2. Just boiled water (~95°C).
3. Steep 5-7 minutes. Cover the cup or pot, the volatile aromatic compounds escape as steam.
4. Drink black, with honey, or with a slice of lemon.
5. Excellent cold brewed for summer.

Foraging elderflower (briefly)

Elderflower is one of the easier wild ingredients to forage in the UK. Three rules:

1. **Identify correctly.** Elder has cream white umbel flowers, opposite leaf pairs with serrated edges, and pithy stems. Don't confuse with the toxic dwarf elder (*Sambucus ebulus*), dwarf elder is herbaceous, not woody, and sits closer to ground level.
2. **Pick on a dry sunny morning.** The aromatic oils are at their peak. Don't pick after rain.
3. **Use within 24 hours fresh, or dry for storage.** Spread on a clean tray in a warm dry room; flowers are dried in 4-7 days.

Foraged elderflower has a fresher, more aromatic character than commercial dried, but commercial is convenient and the difference is modest.

Elderflower cordial (the British classic)

If you forage or buy fresh elderflower, the traditional UK use is cordial:

1. 20-30 fresh elderflower heads
2. 1.5kg sugar
3. 1.5L boiling water
4. 2 lemons (sliced)
5. 50g citric acid

Combine in a large bowl. Cover. Stand 24-48 hours, stirring occasionally. Strain through muslin. Bottle. Refrigerate up to 6 weeks (or freeze concentrate for longer storage). Dilute 1:5 with water for drinking.

Cautions worth knowing

- **Pregnancy.** During pregnancy the NHS sets a daily ceiling of 4 cups of herbal tea and asks you to avoid teas containing liquorice root. Ask your midwife or pharmacist if unsure. Some sources advise caution due to limited research.More on pregnancy and tea.
- **Children.** We steer clear of age and dose advice for children, so that is a job for a pharmacist, health visitor or GP.
- **Diabetes.** Mild blood sugar lowering effects in some studies; discuss with GP if on diabetes medication.
- **Diuretic effect.** Mild diuretic; possible interaction with diuretic medications.
- **Allergies.** Uncommon; possible.
- **Don't eat raw elder berries, leaves, bark, or roots.** Mildly toxic. Only ripe cooked berries and flowers are safe.

Caffeine

0mg.

Buying elderflower tea in the UK

- **Twinings Elderflower & Apple.** Mainstream supermarket option.
- **Pukka Elderberry & Echinacea.** Organic cold season blend.
- **Heath & Heather Elderflower.** UK herbal brand.
- **Specialist loose elderflower.** From herbal tea suppliers; better aromatic.

FAQ

What does elderflower tea taste like? Lightly sweet, floral, slightly grape like aromatic. Gentle and refreshing.

Is elderflower tea good for colds? A traditional UK cold season drink, with weak clinical evidence behind it. A warm cup is comforting in itself; any herbal effect is modest.

Can I make elderflower cordial at home? Yes, fresh elderflowers + sugar + lemon + citric acid. 24-48 hours infusion.

Is it caffeine free? Yes, completely.

Pregnancy safe? During pregnancy the NHS sets a daily ceiling of 4 cups of herbal tea and asks you to avoid teas containing liquorice root. Ask your midwife or pharmacist if unsure.

Curator's note: elderflower is one of those ingredients that tastes of the British countryside in early summer. The cordial tradition is a national treasure; the tea is the year round version. Pick or buy a bag of dried elderflower, brew strong with a slice of lemon, and you've got a proper hedgerow drink. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Elderflower tea, at a glance

Aspect	The plain read
What it is	Infusion of dried elder blossom; a hedgerow herbal, not a tea leaf
Taste	Light, floral, muscat-like; gentle and slightly sweet
Caffeine	None, so an all day and evening cup
Traditional use	Folk use for colds and congestion; comfort, not a proven treatment
Brew	Full boil, 5+ min covered, to hold the volatile florals
Caution	Use flowers, not raw green/unripe berries or bark

Elderflower tea is comfort and a pleasant, aromatic, caffeine-free cup rather than a treatment; this is general information, not medical advice, and it is the flowers that are used, not raw elderberries, leaves or bark. Keep a box from the herbal range, compare a gentle chamomile tea, or browse the full tea shop.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Freshness beats provenance for most drinkers. Buy a smaller bag more often.

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