English Breakfast Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **English Breakfast tea, in summary:** English Breakfast is a blended black tea built to a hearty, brisk style that takes milk well, typically Assam, Ceylon and African leaf.

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

The British drink roughly 100 million cups of tea a day, and the bulk of those are some variant of English Breakfast, a hearty black tea blend designed to take milk and sugar, energise the morning, and cost pennies per cup. The blend is older than the country it's named after; the cup is foundational to British identity. This is the working overview.

What English Breakfast actually is

English Breakfast Tea is a blend (not a single origin tea) of strong black teas designed for British style morning drinking, sturdy enough to stand up to milk and sugar, full bodied enough to wake you up, balanced enough to drink three cups in a row.

The blend typically contains:

- **Assam (Indian).** The malty backbone. Provides body and caffeine.
- **Ceylon (Sri Lankan).** Brightness and balance. Cuts through Assam's heaviness.
- **Kenyan.** Strength and colour. Often used in modern blends.
- **Sometimes: Chinese Keemun.** The traditional blend's softer note. Less common now.

The exact ratios vary by brand. Yorkshire Tea Original leans heavily Assam; Tetley sits more balanced; Twinings uses a lighter Ceylon led blend.

Not a place, a recipe

There is no "English Breakfast plant". The name describes the intended use, a strong morning cup that stands up to milk, not an origin, and each component is chosen for what it contributes to that target. It is a blend rather than a single origin tea for two plain reasons: consistency, because drawing on several origins delivers a reliable cup year round whatever any one harvest does, and cost, because blending is cheaper per kg than buying one garden.

The result is built to taste hearty and full, with enough malt and colour for a satisfying milky mug and a brisk edge that feels refreshing rather than flat. It is deliberately the same every time, which is a skill rather than a shortcoming.

The 100 million cups a day claim

The UK Tea & Infusions Association estimates the UK consumes around 100 million cups of tea daily, roughly 1.6 cups per person per day. The vast majority is bagged black tea, and the vast majority of THAT is some form of English Breakfast or close cousin (Yorkshire Tea, PG Tips, Tetley Original).

The history (briefly)

"English Breakfast" as a tea name dates to the 1840s. Various stories credit either:

- A Scottish tea master, Robert Drysdale, in the 1840s.
- A New York tea merchant, Richard Davies, in 1843.
- Twinings or another London tea merchant.

The name's exact origin is disputed, and so is the date. Tea historians give different originators and dates spanning the 1840s to the 1890s: some accounts place Drysdale's Edinburgh blend half a century later than the 1840s date above. The style is thoroughly British in its development, and by the late 19th century "English Breakfast" was a recognised tea trade category. The name is reported in American advertising from the 1850s. Queen Victoria reportedly took to the blend during her stays at Balmoral, which did its standing no harm, and by 1950 it was Britain's default tea.

The composition has evolved over time. Original blends were China led (Keemun, Congou); after the British developed Indian and Sri Lankan tea industries, the blend shifted toward Assam and Ceylon. Modern blends often include Kenyan tea (a 20th century addition).

How to brew English Breakfast properly

It sounds basic, but most British people brew their EB at the same routine they've used for 30 years without questioning it. The proper method:

1. **Use freshly drawn water.** Don't boil water that's already been boiled, flavour suffers.
2. **Boil to a full rolling boil.** EB needs heat for full extraction.
3. **1 bag (or 1 heaped tsp loose) per 200ml mug.**
4. **Pour water onto the bag, not the bag into the water.** Forces more contact.
5. **Steep 3-5 minutes.** 4 minutes is the sweet spot for most British EB blends.
6. **Stir or squeeze the bag.** Forces extraction. Slightly bitter result if overdone.
7. **Add milk after the tea has brewed.** Adding milk too early reduces water temperature and stops proper extraction.
8. **Sugar to taste.** Optional. Many drinkers find decent EB doesn't need sugar.

Most English Breakfast is brisk CTC style leaf, made for fast strong extraction. That is exactly right for an everyday milky mug, and it is the reason the cup gives less nuance and little second steeping compared with whole loose leaf. It is a fair trade for the job, not a flaw. Judge it on that job: do not measure it against single origin connoisseur standards, because it was never trying to be that, and do not expect it to re steep like whole leaf.

The British milk in tea debate (briefly)

Two camps:

- **Tea first, then milk.** The traditional British method. Lets you judge tea strength before adding milk. Most drinkers' default.
- **Milk first, then tea.** The "MIF" approach (Milk In First). Said to prevent the heat of the tea from "scalding" the milk. Some scientists support this; many drinkers find no practical difference.

The it doesn't really matter for the cup. Drink it however you prefer.

Major English Breakfast brands

Brand	Style	Caffeine/cup
Yorkshire Tea Original	Assam led, hearty	50mg
Yorkshire Gold	Premium Assam led	55-60mg
PG Tips Original	Strong, mass market	45-50mg
Tetley Original	Balanced, Ceylon led	40-45mg
Twinings English Breakfast	Refined, lighter	40-50mg
Hyson Premium Breakfast	Sri Lankan estate	40-50mg
Clipper English Breakfast	Fairtrade, organic	40-50mg

English Breakfast, Irish, Scottish and Yorkshire

Irish Breakfast is the same idea with typically more Assam, so a maltier, stronger cup. Scottish Breakfast pushes Assam strength further again and may bring in Indonesian or a strong Yunnan, a blend built for soft Scottish water. Yorkshire Tea is a branded blend from Taylors of Harrogate: closer to English Breakfast than to either of those, but its own recipe. Both comparisons have a page of their own, English Breakfast vs Irish Breakfast and is Yorkshire Tea English Breakfast?

The "right" English Breakfast for different drinkers

- **Strong builder's tea drinker:** Yorkshire Tea Original or PG Tips.
- **Refined cuppa drinker:** Twinings English Breakfast or Yorkshire Gold.
- **Premium single origin curious:** Hyson Premium Breakfast (Sri Lankan estate).
- **Ethical / organic priority:** Clipper English Breakfast (Fairtrade, organic, plastic free bags).
- **Hard water area:** Choose stronger blends (Yorkshire), hard water masks weaker teas.

The health picture

The health picture is simply the black tea one: caffeine for a real morning lift, polyphenols, hydration, no miracle, and the biggest variable being whatever sugar you add.

Decaf English Breakfast

For evening drinking, pregnancy, or caffeine sensitivity, every major UK brand offers a decaf version. Modern CO2 decaffeination produces a cup very close to caffeinated. Full guide here.

English Breakfast in cooking

English Breakfast tea has uses beyond drinking:

- **Bara Brith (Welsh tea loaf).** Dried fruit soaked overnight in strong tea, then baked into a loaf cake.
- **Tea poached prunes or figs.** Strong EB + sugar + cinnamon as poaching liquid.
- **Tea braised ham or pork.** Strong EB as braising liquid for slow cooking.

More on cooking with tea.

FAQ

What is English Breakfast tea? A blend of black teas (typically Assam, Ceylon, sometimes Kenyan or Chinese) designed for milk and sugar morning drinking.

How much caffeine in English Breakfast? 40-50mg per 200ml cup.

Best English Breakfast brand UK? Yorkshire Tea Original for strong; Twinings for refined; Hyson for single origin Sri Lankan; Clipper for organic.

Should I add milk to English Breakfast? Most British drinkers do. The blend is designed for it.

Can I make English Breakfast without a tea bag? Yes, loose leaf English Breakfast in a teapot or infuser produces a noticeably better cup.

Curator's note: English Breakfast is the most drunk tea on Earth and most British drinkers couldn't tell you the brand they buy from a competitor in a blind taste. The blend works because it's hard to ruin, hot water, milk, sugar, three minutes. The foundation of British tea drinking. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Buy a good English Breakfast in the English Breakfast range, compare the wider black tea range, or browse the full tea shop.

Reference noted

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)
- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Whichever English Breakfast you finish most mornings is the right blend, whatever the shelf says. Curiosity is the only reliable guide.

English Breakfast companion reading

- English Breakfast: brands and the proper cup
- Black tea
- Caffeine in tea
- English Breakfast caffeine
- Builder's tea

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- Tea with Breakfast: Built for the Fry-Up

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