English Breakfast Tea: Brands & the Proper Cup

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **English Breakfast brand buyer, in summary:** Every UK brand sells an English Breakfast and they do differ. How to choose a tin, the hard-water problem, and what actually makes a proper cup.

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

English Breakfast Tea is the UK's favourite brew, the morning cup, the office cup, the visit from relatives cup, the post news headlines cup. Everyone has a favourite brand and a strong opinion about how to make it. The category covers everything from £1.50 supermarket basics to £15-per-100g single estate Assam. This is the working drinker's guide.

What "English Breakfast" actually means on a UK shelf

"English Breakfast" is a style category, not a single tea. Roughly:

- **Strong, robust.** Built for milk and sugar.
- **Black tea.** Always. Never green, oolong, or white.
- **Blend.** Always, single origin teas are usually labelled by their origin (e.g. "Pure Assam") rather than as English Breakfast.
- **Caffeinated.** Standard. Decaf versions are clearly labelled.

The major UK English Breakfast brands compared

Yorkshire Tea Original

Assam led blend with Kenyan. Strong, malty, bold. The default cup for many British drinkers. £3-4 per 80 bags. More Yorkshire here.

Yorkshire Gold

Premium Yorkshire blend. Slightly more refined, slightly more caffeine, slightly more expensive. £4-5 per 80 bags.

PG Tips Original

Strong, mass market, Assam and Kenyan. Slightly grittier brew than Yorkshire. £3-4 per 80 bags.

Tetley Original

Lighter Ceylon led blend. Less punchy than Yorkshire but more drinkable for those who find Yorkshire too strong. £3 per 80 bags.

Twinings English Breakfast

Refined, balanced. Higher Ceylon content. Premium positioning. £4-5 per 80 bags.

Specialist single estate Assam or Ceylon (loose)

Premium tier, £8-15+ per 100g. Single estate orthodox black tea, full leaf, brewed in a teapot. The tea most British drinkers grow into in their 30s and 40s.

Hyson Premium Breakfast

Sri Lankan estate black tea. Stocked here. Mid premium pricing, excellent quality, balanced cup. More Hyson here.

Clipper English Breakfast

Fairtrade, organic, unbleached/plastic free bags. Ethical tier. £3.50-4.50 per 80 bags.

How to brew English Breakfast (the proper way)

1. Use freshly drawn cold water. Don't reboil.
2. Bring to full rolling boil.
3. Pour over the tea bag (or loose leaves in a pot).
4. Steep 3-5 minutes, 4 minutes is the sweet spot.
5. Stir or give the bag a brief squeeze. Don't over squeeze (extracts too much tannin).
6. Remove the bag.
7. Add milk to taste. Sugar optional.

The British "right cup" debates

Tea first or milk first?

Tea first is traditional. Milk first ("MIF") has scientific backing about preventing milk proteins from denaturing. In practice, the difference is undetectable in normal drinking. Do whatever you've always done.

Sugar?

Optional. About a third of UK tea drinkers add sugar; two thirds drink it without. Decent EB doesn't need sugar.

How long to brew?

3 minutes (light), 4 minutes (standard), 5 minutes (strong). Past 5 minutes the cup becomes bitter as tannins extract.

Loose leaf or bag?

Loose leaf in a teapot produces a slightly better cup but takes more time. For most weekday drinking, bags are fine. Save loose leaf for weekends or guests.

Squeeze the bag?

A brief squeeze is fine. A long, hard squeeze extracts bitter tannins. Most British drinkers squeeze briefly out of habit.

What makes a "proper" cup

Subjective, but most British drinkers agree on:

- **Deep colour.** Reddish brown, not pale.
- **Strength.** Stand up a spoon in it strong, but not bitter.
- **Hot.** Not lukewarm. The kettle should have boiled freshly.
- **Right milk ratio.** Cup should still be brown after milk, not beige.
- **Brewed long enough.** 3-5 minutes. Bag dunked-30-seconds is not tea.

The hard water problem

Much of the UK has hard water (high mineral content). Hard water can dull tea flavour and make the cup taste flat. Solutions:

- Use a stronger blend (Yorkshire, PG Tips).
- Use filtered water (Brita filter or similar).
- Brew slightly longer (5 minutes instead of 4).
- Use slightly more tea per cup.

Caffeine summary

Brand	Caffeine per 200ml
Yorkshire Tea Original	50mg
Yorkshire Gold	55-60mg
PG Tips Original	45-50mg
Tetley Original	40-45mg
Twinings EB	40-50mg
Decaf EB (any)	2-5mg

FAQ

What's the difference between English Breakfast and other black tea blends? EB is specifically designed for milk and sugar morning drinking. Other blends (afternoon, Earl Grey) have different design intent.

Best UK English Breakfast brand? Yorkshire for traditional strong; Twinings for refined; Tetley for lighter; Clipper for organic. Personal preference rules.

Why does British EB taste different abroad? Brands sometimes adjust blends for export markets. Hard water and brewing routine also affect cup character significantly.

Is English Breakfast healthier than coffee? Lower caffeine, more polyphenols. Both are healthy components of normal adult diets.

Loose vs bag? Loose leaf produces a marginally better cup. For everyday weekday drinking, bags are fine.

Curator's note: English Breakfast is the tea I've drunk every weekday morning for thirty years. The brand changes occasionally; the cup essentially doesn't. There's something profoundly settling about a tea that doesn't change its character as you grow up around it. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Reference noted

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

Buy and compare in the English Breakfast range, the wider black tea range, or the full tea shop (free UK delivery over £35).

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Five unknown bags drunk in a hurry lose to one good loose breakfast tea in a clean pot.

Black tea brand reading

- What English Breakfast actually is
- Black tea
- Caffeine in tea
- Builder's tea

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