French Tea Culture: Different From British

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **French tea culture, in summary:** French tea culture favours scented, perfumed blends and an afternoon "gouter" rather than a builder mug. The houses, the styles, and how the French brew.

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

French tea culture is dramatically different from British. Where the UK drinks black tea with milk, France drinks lighter, more aromatic teas, green, fruit flavoured, scented blends, usually black or with a slice of lemon. French tea brands have produced some of the most influential and beautiful teas of the past 200 years. We carry a small but distinctive French range.

The French tea drinking culture

Key differences from British:

- **Less milk.** French drinkers rarely add milk to tea. Black or with a slice of lemon is standard.
- **More green tea.** Green tea has stronger market share in France than in the UK.
- **More flavoured tea.** Mariage Frères' wide range of scented and flavoured blends is very French in approach.
- **More variety per household.** French households typically keep 3-5 different teas; British households often keep 1-2 (usually English Breakfast + maybe Earl Grey or chamomile).
- **Salon de thé culture.** Tearooms have a particular cultural status in France, a place for conversation, not just refreshment.
- **Lighter brewing.** Shorter steeps, lower temperatures, more refined cups than British strong and milky tradition.

The major French tea brands

Mariage Frères

The grand old name of French tea, founded in 1854. Premium blended teas in distinctive black tins. Famous for "Marco Polo" (a fruit and flower blended Chinese black) and other scented blends. Available in the UK through specialist retailers and Mariage Frères' own boutiques in London. £15-30 per 100g.

Kusmi Tea

Russian French heritage (founded 1867 in St Petersburg, moved to Paris). Blends like "Anastasia" (Earl Grey + lemon + orange blossom) and a mate, green tea and lemon mix. Distinctive yellow tins. More accessible pricing than Mariage Frères. Available in UK through major retailers.

Dammann Frères

Founded 1692 (the oldest tea house in France). Premium tier. Excellent flavoured teas and Chinese blends. Specialist availability in UK.

Palais des Thés

Modern French specialist (founded 1986). Wide range from single origin to flavoured. Premium tier.

Cotterley

The mainstream French supermarket tea brand. Cotterley is to French supermarkets what Tetley is to British. We stock the Green Mint and Lemon variants. More on Cotterley here.

Twinings (French market)

Twinings sells slightly different blends in the French market, French English Breakfast vs UK English Breakfast are not identical recipes. The French versions tend toward lighter blends.

The signature French tea styles

Marco Polo (Mariage Frères)

Chinese black tea + Tibetan and Chinese fruit and flower aromatics. Sweet, floral, slightly fruity, a distinctively French interpretation of flavoured black tea. Cult following globally.

Anastasia (Kusmi)

Earl Grey with lemon and orange blossom. The Kusmi flagship.

Russian Caravan style

Smoky leaning blend originating from the overland Russia China tea trade. Some Lapsang Souchong + Keemun blend. French tea houses produce excellent versions.

Thé à la menthe (mint tea)

French mint tea is generally green tea + mint, in the Moroccan influenced tradition. Cotterley Green Mint is the supermarket version; specialist French brands do premium versions. More on green mint tea.

Thé fruité (fruit tea)

French fruit flavoured tea is generally subtler and less candy flavoured than UK supermarket fruit tea. Apple cinnamon, pear vanilla, peach rose are typical premium French blends.

How French tea is brewed differently

Black tea

French preparation: full boil, 3-4 minute steep (slightly shorter than British), drunk black or with lemon. Milk is uncommon.

Green tea

Just off boil water (~85°C), 2-3 minute steep. Drunk black with no additions.

Flavoured tea

Standard for the base type. French drinkers generally accept flavoured teas at face value rather than stigmatising them as "not real tea" (a more British attitude).

French tea accessories worth knowing

- **Tea infusers.** Premium French metalwork, silver, copper, fine mesh. Mariage Frères stocks beautiful ones.
- **Tea tins.** Distinctive packaging. Kusmi yellow tins, Mariage Frères black tins, Dammann black and gold are recognisable brands.
- **Salon de thé service.** If visiting France, the Mariage Frères salons in Paris (Le Marais, Faubourg Saint Honoré) and the Kusmi salons offer multi tea tastings. Worth the experience.

Buying French tea in the UK

Several options:

- **teas.co.uk.** Cotterley range stocked. Quick Buy: Cotterley Green Mint.
- **Mariage Frères London.** Boutique in Mayfair; full range available.
- **Selfridges, Fortnum & Mason.** Carry Mariage Frères, Kusmi, Dammann at premium pricing.
- **Online specialists (UK).** Some carry Kusmi, Dammann, Palais des Thés at slightly more accessible pricing.
- **French supermarkets / French food importers.** Mainstream French brands (Cotterley, Lipton French market) at supermarket prices.

Which French tea to start with

- **If you like Earl Grey:** Try Kusmi Anastasia.
- **If you like flavoured black tea:** Try Mariage Frères Marco Polo.
- **If you like mint tea:** Try Cotterley Green Mint or specialist French mint blends.
- **If you want premium:** Try Dammann Frères single origin.
- **If you want supermarket priced authentic French:** Cotterley.

FAQ

Is French tea different from British tea? Yes, French preparations tend lighter (less milk, shorter brewing, more green tea, more flavoured varieties).

Best French tea brand? Mariage Frères for premium tradition. Kusmi for accessible mid premium. Cotterley for mainstream supermarket equivalent.

Where can I buy French tea in the UK? teas.co.uk for Cotterley, plus friends like Mariage Frères London, Selfridges, Fortnum & Mason and other specialist online retailers.

Is Marco Polo tea worth it? Yes, distinctive flavour, unique in the global tea world. £20+ per 100g; premium experience.

Do French people drink Earl Grey? Yes, but typically without milk, and often using the Kusmi Anastasia variant rather than Twinings.

Curator's note: French tea culture is one of the great underrated traditions in the European tea world. Mariage Frères' Marco Polo is the gateway tea for many British drinkers, once you've had it, you understand why the French take their tea seriously without needing to take it strong. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

French vs British tea, at a glance

Aspect	French style	vs British
Signature	Scented, perfumed blends	Less builder-strength, more aromatic
Houses	Mariage Freres, Kusmi, Dammann, Cotterley	Maison-led, not supermarket-led
Ritual	Afternoon gouter, salons de the	An occasion, not an all-day mug
Milk	Rare; usually taken neat	British default is milky
Brew	Often lighter, scent-forward	Less stewed, shorter

Related on the wiki: Using a French Press for Tea, Explained.

Explore the French style with a scented blend in the Earl Grey range, the wider black tea range, or the full tea shop (free UK delivery over £35).

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Try the cheapest plain scented blend before the pricey tins. Pay for the fancy tin only once you like the style.

World tea culture reading

- Tea culture around the world
- black tea reference
- the Earl Grey guide
- British tea culture

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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