Gunpowder Green Tea

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Gunpowder green tea, in summary:** Gunpowder is Chinese green rolled into pellets that unfurl: bold, brisk, faintly smoky, the classic Moroccan mint base. Grades, brewing and what it is for.

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

Gunpowder green tea, Chinese rolled green tea, the foundation of Moroccan mint tea, has been produced for over a thousand years and remains one of the most important and accessible green tea styles globally. The name comes from the rolled leaf pellets that resemble buckshot. The cup is stronger, more substantial than typical loose leaf green, and built for the heavily sweetened mint tea preparations of North Africa.

What gunpowder is

Gunpowder green tea (?? zh? chá, "pearl tea") is a Chinese green tea where the freshly processed leaves are tightly rolled into small pellets that resemble buckshot or birdshot, hence the English "gunpowder" name. The rolling preserves the leaf, slows oxidation, and produces a stronger, more substantial cup than typical loose leaf green.

Major production region: Zhejiang Province, China. Other regions in China and Taiwan also produce gunpowder style teas.

The history

Gunpowder is one of the oldest commercial Chinese teas, produced in mass quantities since the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE). The rolling technique was originally developed for storage and transportation efficiency, tightly rolled leaves take less volume than loose leaves, important for shipping over long distances.

The tea reached the Western world via 17th-19th century maritime trade. North African countries (especially Morocco) adopted gunpowder enthusiastically in the 18th-19th centuries, where it became the foundation of the Moroccan mint tea tradition. More on Moroccan mint here.

What gunpowder tastes like

Stronger than typical Chinese green tea. The cup is:

- **Bold and substantial.** Heavier body than Long Jing or Bi Luo Chun.
- **Slightly toasty.** The rolling process and pan firing produce mild Maillard reaction notes.
- **Mineral.** Distinctive earthy character.
- **Mildly astringent.** Tolerates more brewing aggression than delicate sencha.

The strength makes gunpowder ideal for North African style heavily sweetened mint tea, the sugar and mint don't overwhelm the tea base the way they would with delicate green.

How to brew gunpowder

Western style

1. 1 tsp pellets per 200ml.
2. Water at 80-85°C (gunpowder tolerates slightly higher than sencha).
3. Steep 2-3 minutes, pellets unfurl during brewing.
4. Good plain, or with a touch of honey.

Moroccan style mint tea

1. 1-2 heaped tsp gunpowder per 250ml.
2. Pour boiling water; quickly pour out (this "wash" removes dust and softens leaves).
3. Add fresh mint sprigs and 2-3 sugar cubes.
4. Add fresh boiling water; steep 5-7 minutes.
5. Pour into a Moroccan teapot, then pour from height into small glasses (creates aerated foam).
6. Drink very hot, in small sips.

Multiple infusions

Gunpowder is durable, quality leaves can yield 3-4 infusions in Western brewing or up to 6-7 in gongfu style preparation. Each subsequent steep is slightly different in character. More on gongfu brewing.

Caffeine

30-40mg per 200ml cup. Slightly higher than typical sencha because gunpowder uses more mature leaves and the rolling produces a fuller extraction.

Use cases

- **Moroccan style mint tea.** The defining application.
- **Gongfu brewing.** Multiple short infusions reveal different character layers.
- **Cold brewing.** Excellent. More on cold brew.
- **Daily green tea.** Cheaper and more substantial than premium Chinese greens.

- **Cooking.** Strong brewed gunpowder works in some Asian style braising liquids.

Quality tiers

- **Premium gunpowder ("Pinhead Gunpowder").** Smaller, tighter pellets. Brighter, less astringent cup. £15-25 per 100g.
- **Standard gunpowder.** Larger pellets, more variation. Decent daily brew. £8-15 per 100g.
- **Commodity gunpowder.** Mass produced, often used in commercial mint tea blends. Adequate for North African style preparation.

Storage

Gunpowder is more storage stable than loose leaf green tea because the tightly rolled pellets minimise surface area exposure to air. Best within 12 months opened; viable for 18-24 months in proper airtight storage.

Buying gunpowder in the UK

- **Twinings Gunpowder Green.** Mainstream supermarket option.
- **Whittard Gunpowder.** UK speciality.
- **teas.co.uk, and for the wider field Mei Leaf, What Cha and Postcard Teas.** Specialist Chinese tea retailers, premium grades.
- **Asian groceries.** Often best value for everyday gunpowder.

Cautions

- **Caffeine sensitivity.** Standard green tea range; can be brewed strong in mint tea preparation.
- **Iron absorption.** Tannins; drink between meals.
- **Pregnancy.** Within NHS caffeine limits is fine.

FAQ

Why is it called gunpowder? The rolled leaf pellets resemble buckshot, hence the English name "gunpowder."

Is gunpowder caffeinated? Yes, 30-40mg per 200ml cup, slightly higher than sencha.

Best for Moroccan mint tea? Yes, gunpowder is the traditional and ideal base for Moroccan mint preparation.

How does gunpowder taste vs Long Jing? Stronger, more mineral, less subtle. Better for heavily sweetened preparations; Long Jing is better for delicate drinking.

Best brewing temperature? 80-85°C, slightly higher than premium Japanese green.

Curator's note: gunpowder is the workhorse of Chinese green tea, bold, durable, multiple infusions, ideal for North African style preparations. Worth keeping in the cupboard alongside more delicate green teas. Lee,

teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Gunpowder green, at a glance

Aspect	The read
What it is	Chinese green rolled into tight pellets that "explode" open
Taste	Bold, brisk, slightly smoky; sturdy for a green
Best use	The classic Moroccan mint base; strong everyday green
Brew	Off the boil, short; pellets need room to unfurl
Quality tiers	Pinhead (fine) to commodity; price tracks grade

For the brewing detail and Moroccan tradition in depth, see gunpowder tea explained. Buy a good one in the green tea range, compare a Moroccan mint, or browse the full tea shop.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · With gunpowder, what one cup costs is all that matters. Loose pellets usually win; supermarket bags sometimes keep up.

Chinese green reading

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- Chinese tea overview
- Peppermint tea

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