Hibiscus Tea: The Tart Red Brew, Explained

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Hibiscus tea, in summary:** Hibiscus is the tart, ruby, caffeine-free brew of sorrel, karkade and agua de Jamaica, best iced. The culture, the modest BP evidence, and how to brew it.

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

Hibiscus tea is the deep red tart infusion that's been a daily drink across Egypt, Mexico, the Caribbean, and West Africa for centuries. Vivid colour, cranberry like tartness, naturally caffeine free, and one of the few herbal teas with real clinical evidence behind some of its claims, particularly modest blood pressure reduction with daily consumption.

The plant

Hibiscus tea is brewed from the dried flowers (calyces) of *Hibiscus sabdariffa*, also called roselle. The plant is native to West Africa and now grown across the tropics, Egypt, Sudan, Mexico, Senegal, Thailand, and the Caribbean.

The cultural traditions

- **Egypt and Sudan:** Karkade. Drunk hot or iced; often heavily sugared. Wedding and celebration drink.
- **Mexico:** Agua de Jamaica. Iced, sugared, with a slice of lime. Standard restaurant drink.
- **Caribbean (Jamaica especially):** Sorrel drink. Christmas tradition; spiced with ginger and rum.
- **West Africa:** Bissap or zobo. Hot or iced, sometimes blended with mint.

What hibiscus contains

- **Anthocyanins.** The pigments that produce the deep red colour. Antioxidant activity.
- **Vitamin C.** Modest amounts, meaningful when brewed strongly.
- **Polyphenols broadly.** Antioxidant load.
- **Mild diuretic compounds.** Real but gentle effect.
- **Citric and malic acids.** Source of the tart cranberry like flavour.

The blood pressure evidence

Multiple controlled trials suggest daily hibiscus tea consumption modestly lowers blood pressure in people with mild to moderate hypertension. Effect size: typically 5-10 mmHg systolic, 3-6 mmHg diastolic with daily consumption (2-3 cups). This is comparable to gentle dietary interventions, smaller than prescription medication.

Worth knowing if you have mild hypertension; not a substitute for medical management of severe hypertension.

What it tastes like

Vivid pink red brew. Tart, cranberry like, slightly floral. Most people like it better with honey or sugar stirred in, because neat hibiscus is properly tart.

How to brew

1. 1-2 tsp dried hibiscus per 200ml (or 1 tea bag).
2. Just boiled water (~95°C).
3. Steep 5-7 minutes for full colour and flavour.
4. Sweeten generously (the traditional way) or to taste.
5. Optional: lime, ginger, mint, cinnamon stick.

Iced hibiscus (the best application)

Cold brew or hot brew then cool. Tip it over ice and drop in a slice of lime. The tartness, colour, and refreshment are excellent in summer. More on cold brew.

Caribbean Sorrel recipe (Christmas)

1. 50g dried hibiscus + 30g fresh ginger sliced + 4-6 cloves + 1 cinnamon stick + zest of 1 orange.
2. Steep in 1L boiling water for 30 minutes covered.
3. Strain. Sweeten generously (200-300g sugar to taste).
4. Optional: add 100ml white rum for adult version.
5. Refrigerate. Serve cold.

Caffeine

0mg.

Cautions

- **Pregnancy.** Heavy daily hibiscus is sometimes cautioned in first trimester due to possible effects on uterine contraction. One cup occasionally is fine. More on pregnancy and tea.
- **Blood pressure medication.** Hibiscus has additive blood pressure lowering effect. Discuss with GP if heavy daily intake.

- **Diuretic effect.** Mild; relevant if on diuretic medication.
- **Tooth enamel.** Tart; rinse with water after.

Buying

- **Pukka Berry Beautiful, Hibiscus & Rose:** Hibiscus led blends.
- **Twinings Hibiscus Mango:** Mainstream.
- **Egyptian/African groceries:** Pure dried hibiscus loose, best value.
- **Specialist herb suppliers:** Premium grades.

FAQ

Is hibiscus tea good for blood pressure? Yes, modest evidence for daily consumption mildly lowering blood pressure.

Is it caffeine free? Yes.

Pregnancy safe? Limit heavy daily intake especially in first trimester.

Best application? Iced, sweetened, with lime, agua de Jamaica style.

Karkade and agua de Jamaica, same drink? Yes, same plant, different cultural names.

Curator's note: hibiscus is one of the few herbal teas that has been properly studied. Beautiful colour, real blood pressure effect, pregnancy cautious in first trimester only. Worth keeping in the cupboard for iced summer drinking. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Hibiscus, the tart red brew, at a glance

Aspect	The read
What it is	Caffeine-free infusion of dried hibiscus calyces
Taste	Sharp, cranberry-tart, deep ruby red
Best use	Iced: brew strong, pour over ice; Caribbean Sorrel
Modest evidence	Mild blood-pressure lowering with regular intake
Caution	BP medication and pregnancy: clinician-first

This is general information, not medical advice; if you take blood-pressure medication or are pregnant, take advice from a GP first. Buy a good hibiscus in the herbal range or browse the full tea shop.

FROM THE CURATOR

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Hibiscus deeper reading

- Hibiscus tea: the full reference
- Hibiscus & blood pressure
- Hibiscus tea in pregnancy
- Herbal tea overview

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- Green tea
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