Honeybush Tea: The South African Brew, Explained

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Honeybush, in summary:** Honeybush is rooibos's lesser-known South African cousin: naturally sweeter, more aromatic and caffeine-free.

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

Honeybush is rooibos's lesser known South African cousin, naturally sweeter, more aromatic, and one of the most underrated caffeine free infusions on the UK shelf. Native to the same Western Cape region as rooibos, honeybush has a honey and floral character that gave it its name. Worth knowing about if rooibos has become routine.

The plant

Honeybush (*Cyclopia genistoides* and several related species) is a flowering shrub native to South Africa's Western and Eastern Cape provinces. The yellow flowers and the dried leaves both go into the tea, the flowers contribute aromatic intensity, the leaves provide body. The dried tea has a distinctive honey floral aroma when fresh.

Like rooibos, honeybush grows almost exclusively in its native region. Several Cyclopia species are commercially harvested:

- *Cyclopia genistoides* (coastal honeybush)
- *Cyclopia subternata* (mountain honeybush)
- *Cyclopia intermedia* (highland honeybush)
- *Cyclopia maculata* (less common)

Honeybush vs rooibos

Attribute	Honeybush	Rooibos
Origin	Western/Eastern Cape SA	Western Cape SA
Caffeine	0mg	0mg
Cup colour	Golden amber	Red amber
Sweetness	Honey floral, more aromatic	Woody sweet, less aromatic

Distinctive compounds	Mangiferin, hesperidin	Aspalathin
Production volume	Smaller, rarer	Larger
UK availability	Specialist retailers	Mainstream
Price tier	Slightly premium	Mainstream

What honeybush tastes like

Naturally sweet, unlike rooibos's woody vanilla character, honeybush has an actual floral honey aromatic. The cup is golden amber, gently sweet, slightly aromatic. Many drinkers find it more interesting than rooibos because of the additional aromatic complexity.

The compound profile

- **Mangiferin.** A xanthonoid flavonoid (also found in mango). Some animal studies have looked at it in connection with blood sugar.
- **Hesperidin.** Citrus related flavonoid. Mild antioxidant.
- **Various polyphenols.** Antioxidant load.
- **No caffeine.** Suitable for evening, pregnancy, children.

How to brew

1. 1 tea bag per 200ml (or 1 heaped tsp loose).
2. Just boiled water (~95°C). Honeybush, like rooibos, tolerates full boil.
3. Steep 5-7 minutes for full extraction.
4. Drink black, natural sweetness is sufficient.
5. Optional: small amount of milk (works), honey (rarely needed).

Use cases

- **Evening drink.** Caffeine free; naturally sweet; gentle aromatic.
- **Pregnancy.** While pregnant, keep to four cups of honeybush or other herbal tea in a day, and skip anything containing liquorice root, says the NHS. Ask your midwife or pharmacist if unsure.
- **Children.** For a child's age or amount, we leave the answer to a pharmacist, health visitor or GP.
- **Iced tea.** Excellent cold brewed. More on cold brew.
- **Latte base.** Honeybush latte (steamed milk + brewed honeybush) works very well.
- **Alternative to rooibos.** When you want something gentler and more aromatic.

Common honeybush blends

- **Honeybush + mint.** Cooling sweet; Dragonfly Sleepy Mint and Honeybush is a good example.
- **Honeybush + chamomile.** Sleep leaning blend.

- **Honeybush + rooibos.** Combined Cape herbs.
- **Honeybush + spices.** Honeybush chai variant, sweet warming alternative to traditional chai.

Buying honeybush in the UK

Honeybush has smaller production than rooibos and isn't carried by most mainstream UK supermarkets. Available through:

- Specialist tea retailers (teas.co.uk, Mei Leaf, Postcard Teas, Whittard)
- Some health food shops (Holland & Barrett, Planet Organic)
- South African specialty importers

Cautions

- **Allergies.** Honeybush is in the legume family. Cross reactions uncommon.
- **Pregnancy.** While pregnant, keep to four cups of honeybush or other herbal tea in a day, and skip anything containing liquorice root, says the NHS. Ask your midwife or pharmacist if unsure. Limited specific research.
- **Children.** For a child's age or amount, we leave the answer to a pharmacist, health visitor or GP.

Caffeine

0mg.

FAQ

What is honeybush? A South African flowering shrub similar to rooibos, with a sweeter and more aromatic cup.

Caffeine free? Yes, completely.

Tastes like rooibos? Similar category, distinctly different, honeybush is more aromatic and floral; rooibos is more woody sweet.

Pregnancy safe? While pregnant, keep to four cups of honeybush or other herbal tea in a day, and skip anything containing liquorice root, says the NHS. Ask your midwife or pharmacist if unsure.

Where to buy? Specialist tea retailers; some health food shops. Less mainstream than rooibos.

Curator's note: honeybush is the underrated alternative to rooibos. If you've drunk rooibos for years and want something gently different, honeybush is the natural next step. Its floral honey character sets it apart. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

This is general information, not medical advice. Buy a good honeybush in the herbal range, compare a rooibos, or browse the full tea shop.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Drink the honeybush you enjoy, whatever the rooibos aisle suggests. Curiosity is the only reliable guide.

Honeybush family reading

- Honeybush, the detailed reference
- Rooibos
- Herbal tea overview
- Caffeine-free tea

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- Green tea
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