How to Make Tea Properly: The Eight Step Method

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **How to make tea properly, in summary:** Making tea properly is a short list of physical levers, not ceremony: fresh water, the right temperature, measured leaf, a timed steep, milk by choice.

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

Making tea properly is one of those small daily skills that everyone in Britain claims to know and only some really do. The fundamentals: fresh drawn water, full rolling boil, 4-minute steep, milk after, no over squeezing. Get those right and your morning cup hits its potential consistently.

The eight step proper tea making protocol

1. **Fill the kettle with fresh drawn cold water.** Don't boil yesterday's water.
2. **Bring to full rolling boil.** Don't stop early.
3. **Pre warm the teapot** (if using one) with a splash of hot water; pour out.
4. **Place the tea** 1 bag per 200ml mug, or 1 heaped tsp loose leaf per 200ml in the pot.
5. **Pour boiling water over the tea:** go to the kettle, not the kettle to the pot.
6. **Steep 3-5 minutes** 4 minutes is the British default for English Breakfast.
7. **Stir or briefly squeeze the bag:** don't aggressively wring it out.
8. **Add milk and sugar to taste:** milk after the bag is removed.

Why each step matters

Fresh water

Re boiled water has lower dissolved oxygen, producing flatter cups. The "tea makes a difference" feeling between flat and characterful cups often traces back to whether the kettle was freshly drawn.

Full rolling boil

Black tea (Yorkshire, English Breakfast) needs heat for full extraction. Lower temperatures produce thin, weak cups. Note: this is the OPPOSITE of green tea brewing, green tea wants 75-80°C, not boiling.

Pre warm the pot

A cold ceramic teapot drops water temperature 5-10°C immediately on pour. Pre warming with a splash of hot water keeps brewing temperature high enough for proper extraction.

Right ratio

1 bag per 200ml is the British default. Variations: 1 heaped tsp per 200ml for loose leaf. Stronger drinkers use slightly more; lighter drinkers use slightly less.

Pour water onto the tea

Forces immediate full contact with the dry leaves. "Bag floating in cooling water" produces weaker cups.

4-minute steep

3 minutes for lighter; 5 minutes for stronger. Past 5 minutes, tannins begin to dominate and the cup turns bitter.

Brief stir or squeeze

Forces extraction completion. Long aggressive squeezing extracts bitter tannins.

Milk after, not during

Adding milk during brewing reduces water temperature and stops proper extraction. The cup ends up weaker.

Tea by tea, adjustments to the standard protocol

English Breakfast (any brand)

Standard protocol works. 4 minutes is optimal. Detailed EB brewing.

Earl Grey

Same as EB but steep ONLY 3-3½ minutes. Bergamot oil becomes acrid past 4 minutes.

Darjeeling

Steep ONLY 2-3 minutes. Don't add milk. Drink black to taste the muscatel character. More on Darjeeling.

Green tea

Water at 75-80°C, NOT boiling. Steep 2-3 minutes. NO milk. More on green tea brewing.

White tea

Water at 80-85°C. Steep 4-5 minutes. No milk.

Oolong

Water at 85-95°C depending on style. Steep 3-5 minutes. No milk.

Herbal infusions

Boiling water. Steep 5-7 minutes. Cover the cup (volatile aromatics escape as steam).

The hard water adjustment

Much of the UK has hard water (high mineral content). Tea brewed in hard water can taste flat. Solutions:

- Filter the water (Brita or similar).
- Use slightly stronger tea blends (Yorkshire Tea over Tetley).
- Brew slightly longer (5 minutes instead of 4).
- Yorkshire Tea Hard Water (a specifically formulated variant) exists.

Common British tea making mistakes

- **Re boiling kettle water.** Flatter cup.
- **Brief steep.** Bag dunked 30 seconds isn't tea.
- **Boiling water on green tea.** Bitters the cup.
- **Aggressive squeezing.** Tannin extraction = harsh cup.
- **Forgetting the bag.** Stewed tea is bitter.
- **Adding milk during brewing.** Stops proper extraction.
- **Wrong temperature for non black tea.** Each tea type has its own brewing.

The tea first vs milk first debate

Some scientists argue milk first ("MIF") protects milk proteins from heat denaturation. Tea first is traditional in Britain. In practice, the difference is undetectable in normal drinking. Drink it however you've always done it.

Equipment basics

- **Kettle.** Any. Variable temperature kettles useful for green/white tea.
- **Teapot.** Optional but produces slightly better cups for loose leaf or multiple cups.
- **Mug.** Tall narrow shapes retain heat better than wide shallow.
- **Strainer.** For loose leaf brewing, fine mesh.

FAQ

How do I make a proper cup of British tea? Fresh water, full boil, 4-minute steep, milk after. The fundamentals.

Should I add milk before or after? After, adding milk during brewing stops extraction.

How long should I steep tea? 4 minutes for British black tea. 2-3 for green. 5-7 for herbal.

Boiling water for all tea? No, only black, herbal, and oolong. Green and white tea need lower temperatures.

Why does my tea taste different from someone else's same brand? Water quality, brewing time, temperature, milk amount all vary.

Curator's note: making tea properly is the small daily skill most British drinkers got into a routine on at age 18 and never adjusted. A 30 second fix to your morning routine changes every cup for good. The basics matter. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

The proper-cup protocol, at a glance

Step	The rule
Water	Fresh, freshly drawn, not reboiled; reboiling flattens it
Temperature	Boiling for black; ~80C off the boil for green and delicate
Quantity	Roughly one teaspoon (or one bag) per cup; measure, do not guess
Time	Steep to the type (black ~3, 4 min; green ~1, 2); do not stew
Agitation	One gentle stir; squeezing the bag adds only bitterness
Milk/sugar	After tasting, by choice, not by reflex

The other half of a good cup is the leaf: a dependable black tea, a fresh green tea, or the full tea shop.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Spend less on prestige, more on freshness. Bags two months old, brewed properly, outdo a tin of three years' standing.

Brewing technique reading

- How to make tea
- Ideal water temperatures
- Milk in tea
- How to make matcha properly

More related guides

- How to Make Thai Tea (the Bright Orange One)
- How to Make Tea in a Hotel Room
- How to Make Sun Tea

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
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