Tea Infusers: Types, Good vs Bad, Explained

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Tea infusers, in summary:** An infuser has one job: give the leaf room in full water contact. Roomy basket good, cramped ball bad, and "loose leaf is harder" is a bad-infuser myth.

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

Tea infusers, the metal mesh baskets, balls, and devices for brewing loose leaf tea, are how most British drinkers transition from bag tea to loose leaf. The right infuser matters more than people realise: cheap mesh balls produce weaker cups than properly designed basket infusers.

The major infuser types

Basket infuser

Stainless steel mesh basket with handle that sits in the mug or teapot. Allows leaves room to expand fully. Best leaf to water contact. Easy to fill and empty. £5-15.

Best for: Most loose leaf teas. Good everyday choice.

Mesh ball / tea egg

Hinged metal ball that closes around tea leaves. Cheap (£3-8) and convenient but produces weaker cups because leaves don't have room to expand fully.

Best for: Smaller leaves; emergency / travel use.

Brewing basket with lid (in mug brewing)

Larger basket that fits inside a mug, with lid that doubles as drip tray. Allows steeping then easy removal. £10-25.

Best for: Single cup brewing; office tea; travel mugs.

Tea ball with chain

Mesh ball on a chain. Drop into mug; lift out by chain when steeped. £5-12.

Best for: Travel; budget option.

Cotton / silicone bags

Reusable fabric bags. Fill with loose tea, tie shut, brew. Eco friendly. £5-15 for set.

Best for: Eco conscious drinkers; travel.

Glass teapot with built in filter

Teapot with permanent or removable mesh filter at the spout. £15-50.

Best for: Multi cup brewing; visual appeal (watching leaves unfurl).

Yixing clay pot

Traditional Chinese teapot, small, one tea type specific, develops "memory" of one tea over years. £20-100+. Specialist gongfu equipment.

Gaiwan

Chinese lidded cup. £10-30. Used for gongfu brewing, multiple short infusions. More on gongfu.

What makes a good infuser

- **Sufficient size.** Leaves need room to expand 3-5×.
- **Fine mesh.** Doesn't let small leaf fragments through.
- **Easy to fill and empty.**
- **Safe heat handling.** Doesn't burn fingers.
- **Easy to clean.** Removable from mug; dishwasher safe ideally.
- **Stainless steel or food safe materials.**

What makes a bad infuser

- **Too small.** Mesh ball that limits leaf expansion = weaker cup.
- **Too large mesh.** Lets leaf fragments through; gritty cup.
- **Plastic that warps with heat.** Some cheap plastic infusers degrade over time.
- **Hard to clean.** Dried tea sticks; mould risk.

The "loose leaf is harder" myth

Common objection to loose leaf brewing: "infusers are awkward."

Reality: a basket infuser takes 20 seconds to fill, set in mug, brew, remove, and empty into compost. About 10 seconds longer than a tea bag. Not a meaningful obstacle.

Infuser sizes by use case

Single mug

Basket infuser or tea egg. Brewing 200ml. Most common UK use.

Small teapot (2-cup, 400ml)

Built in filter or basket infuser. Multiple cups from one brewing.

Medium teapot (4-cup, 800ml)

Built in filter or larger basket infuser.

Large teapot (6-cup, 1.2L)

Built in filter; brewing for guests.

Gongfu brewing (100ml gaiwan)

No infuser needed, leaves brew loose; pour through fine strainer.

Brewing protocol with basket infuser

1. Pre warm mug with splash of hot water; pour out.
2. Add 1 heaped tsp loose tea to basket infuser.
3. Place infuser in mug.
4. Pour boiling water (or temperature appropriate water) over leaves.
5. Steep appropriate time for tea type.
6. Remove infuser; let drip into mug; rest on saucer or dedicated tray.
7. Drink.

Cleaning

- Empty leaves into compost or bin.
- Rinse with hot water (no soap needed for fresh use).
- Air dry between uses.
- Periodic deep clean: soak in hot water + vinegar to remove mineral build up.
- Most infusers are dishwasher safe; check specifications.

Cost quality range

Tier	Price	Quality
Budget	£3-8	Mesh ball; functional
Mid tier	£10-20	Decent basket infuser
Premium	£25-50	Premium materials, durable
Specialty	£50-200+	Yixing pots, gongfu sets

Buying

teas.co.uk, kitchen retailers like John Lewis and Lakeland, friends such as Whittard and Mei Leaf, and Amazon. Most well reviewed basket infusers from established brands cost £10-15 and last years.

FAQ

Best infuser type for beginners? Basket infuser. £10-15. Sits in mug; large enough for proper leaf expansion.

Are mesh balls bad? Less optimal than basket infusers. Functional for emergencies; not ideal for regular use.

Cotton or silicone bags? Reusable, eco friendly. Slightly slower brewing than rigid baskets.

Do I need different infusers for different teas? Generally no, one good basket infuser works for most teas.

Yixing pot worth it? For serious gongfu drinking, yes. For casual loose leaf use, no.

Curator's note: a £15 basket infuser changed my tea drinking more than any tea purchase ever did. Loose leaf brewing transforms tea quality; the infuser is the gateway. Don't buy mesh balls, go straight to basket infuser. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Related on the wiki: Teapots And Infusers.

A natural follow-on: the teaware range.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Use the infuser you enjoy brewing with, whatever the shelf says you should. Curiosity is the only reliable guide.

Teaware reading

- How to use a tea infuser
- Tea equipment
- How to choose a teapot
- Loose leaf vs tea bags

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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