Irish Breakfast Tea, Explained

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Irish tea, in summary:** Irish breakfast tea is a strong, malty, Assam-led blend bred for a brisk full cup that stands up to generous milk, much of why Ireland out-drinks the UK.

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

Irish tea is a different thing from English breakfast tea, stronger, redder, more Assam led, designed for Ireland's traditional milk and sugar drinking. Barry's and Lyons are the two best known Irish brands, and both produce a cup that's noticeably sturdier than typical UK English Breakfast.

What makes Irish tea different

Irish tea drinking culture is even more milk and sugar oriented than British. The blends reflect this:

- **More Assam, less Ceylon.** Higher proportion of strong Indian black tea.
- **More Kenyan tea.** Adds colour, strength, and price accessibility.
- **Stronger overall.** Built to stand up to milk that's added generously.
- **Often deeper red brown cup colour.** Reflects the stronger Assam Kenyan base.

The two iconic Irish tea brands

Barry's Tea

Cork based, founded 1901. Two main blends:

- **Barry's Gold Blend (Green Box).** Premium tier, strong, hearty, malty. Heavy Assam content.
- **Barry's Classic Blend (Red Box).** Standard everyday tier, Ceylon led with Assam.

Barry's Gold is widely considered the gold standard of Irish breakfast tea, and it is on our shelf: Barry's Tea Gold Blend, 80 Tea Bags.

Lyons Tea

Dublin based, founded 1902. Long the dominant brand in Irish supermarkets. Stronger Kenyan/Assam led blend; recognisable yellow box. Mainstream Irish; UK availability limited.

Bewley's Tea

Smaller Irish brand, mostly café tier. Premium positioning.

Robert Roberts

Smaller Irish brand. Fairtrade options.

Why Ireland drinks more tea per capita than the UK

Ireland and the UK both rank near the top globally for per capita tea consumption. Ireland's average is ~4-5 cups per day, slightly higher than the UK average. Reasons:

- Centuries of cultural integration, tea became a daily staple after British importation.
- Pub culture historically less coffee oriented than continental Europe.
- Strong rural tradition of "the tea break" through working day.
- Tea as universal hospitality drink, similar to British "I'll put the kettle on."

What Irish tea tastes like

- **Stronger than typical British EB.** More body, more colour, more caffeine.
- **Maltier.** Assam led blend produces malty backbone.
- **Tolerates generous milk.** Built for it.
- **Deep red brown cup.** Reflects the strong base.

How to brew Irish tea

1. 1 bag (or 1 heaped tsp loose) per 200ml.
2. Water at full rolling boil.
3. Steep 4-5 minutes (Barry's especially benefits from longer brewing).
4. Add milk generously (Irish drinkers add more milk than British average).
5. Sugar to taste, Irish drinkers often use 1-2 sugars.

Caffeine

50-60mg per 200ml cup. Slightly higher than typical UK EB because of the stronger Assam led blend.

Buying Irish tea in the UK

- **teas.co.uk.** Barry's Tea Gold Blend is on our shelf.
- **Specialist UK tea retailers.** Carry Barry's and Lyons.
- **Some larger Tesco / Sainsbury's stores.** May carry Barry's Gold in tea aisle.
- **Irish food shops in UK cities.** London, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, Irish food specialty importers carry the full range.
- **Online from Irish retailers.** Barry's, Lyons, Bewley's all sell direct internationally.

How Irish tea compares to British equivalents

Brand	Strength	Style
Barry's Gold	Very strong	Premium Irish, malty
Barry's Classic	Strong	Standard Irish
Lyons	Strong	Mainstream Irish, Kenyan led
Yorkshire Tea	Strong	British, Assam led
PG Tips	Strong	British, mass market
Tetley	Mid	British, Ceylon led

The Northern Irish vs Republic distinction

Northern Ireland tea drinking is similar to Republic, same brands available, same milk heavy preference. Some preferences for British brands due to historical and political affinities; many drinkers happily drink either.

FAQ

Is Irish tea different from British tea? Yes, Irish tea is typically stronger, more Assam Kenyan led, designed for heavy milk drinking.

Best Irish tea brand? Barry's Gold for premium; Barry's Classic for everyday; Lyons for traditional Irish supermarket.

Caffeine? 50-60mg per cup, slightly higher than typical UK EB.

Where to buy in UK? Specialist tea retailers, some larger supermarkets, Irish food specialty shops.

Can I substitute Yorkshire for Irish tea? Yorkshire is comparably strong but slightly different character. Irish drinkers visiting the UK often default to Yorkshire if Barry's isn't available.

Curator's note: Barry's Gold is one of the best everyday black teas globally. If you've only drunk British EB, try a box of Barry's Gold, the difference is real and immediate. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Same shelf, same shop: the English tea range and loose leaf range.

Reference noted

- EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine (2015)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Try the cheapest plain Irish breakfast blend first. Move to the premium tier only once you like the style.

Breakfast blend reading

- English Breakfast tea
- Assam tea
- Black tea

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