Junshan Yinzhen: The Rare Yellow Tea Overview

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Junshan Yinzhen, in summary:** Junshan Yinzhen is the most celebrated yellow tea, the rarest Chinese category, a sweet mellow golden bud tea defined by the men huang step.

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

Junshan Yinzhen ("Junshan Silver Needle") is one of China's most celebrated yellow teas, an extremely rare, distinctive, premium specialty grown on Junshan Island in Hunan Province. Slightly oxidised through a unique "yellowing" step that distinguishes it from green tea, it produces a delicate, slightly sweet, golden yellow cup that's unlike anything in the West.

Yellow tea, the rare category

Yellow tea (?? huángchá) is the rarest of the six Chinese tea categories. It accounts for less than 1% of Chinese tea production. The processing is similar to green tea but with an additional "yellowing" step:

1. Pluck (very young buds).
2. Briefly fix (heat deactivate enzymes, like green tea).
3. Wrap in cloth or paper for several hours, controlled mild oxidation occurs.
4. Dry.

The wrapping step (called "men huang", "sealing yellow") produces a slight non enzymatic transformation of the leaf compounds, removing some of the grassiness and adding a sweet mellowness.

Junshan Yinzhen specifically

Junshan Yinzhen is the most famous yellow tea, grown on Junshan Island in Dongting Lake (Hunan Province). The tea has imperial heritage, historically presented as tribute to Chinese emperors. Modern production is small (the island is small, only a few hundred kilograms of premium grade per year), making it rare and expensive.

What it looks like

Slim golden yellow buds, all tip, no opened leaves. The dry tea looks like sharp slim needles with a slight golden cast. Premium quality is judged by uniformity, golden colour intensity, and bud size.

What it tastes like

Pale golden yellow cup. Sweet, gentle, slightly floral with hints of melon and peach. Less grassy than green tea; slightly creamy mouth feel. The sweetness is natural, no sugar required.

How to brew Junshan Yinzhen

Standing brew (the showpiece method)

1. Tall narrow glass tumbler.
2. 3-5g of leaves (a generous pinch).
3. Pour 70-75°C water to fill the tumbler.
4. The needles initially float, then over 1-2 minutes gradually descend (the "three rises and three falls", needles rise as steam carries them, fall as they wet).
5. Drink at the top of the tumbler; the leaves stay at the bottom.

The vertical brewing method is traditional and dramatic, the rising and falling needles are part of the tea's appeal.

Standard brewing

1. 1 heaped tsp per 200ml.
2. Water at 70-75°C.
3. Steep 2-3 minutes.
4. Strain. Drink black.
5. Yields 3-4 infusions.

Caffeine

20-30mg per 200ml cup. Lower than typical green tea because of the all bud composition.

The price

Premium Junshan Yinzhen: £100-300+ per 100g. Mid tier yellow tea (often sold as Junshan style without the actual island origin): £30-60 per 100g. Yellow tea is properly expensive and not for daily drinking.

Other yellow teas worth knowing

- **Huo Shan Huang Ya.** "Mount Huo Yellow Bud", Anhui Province. Mid tier premium yellow tea.
- **Mengding Huangya.** Sichuan Province. Less famous but excellent.
- **Generic "Yellow Bud" teas.** Lower tier yellow tea production from various regions.

Use cases

- **Tea tasting / appreciation.** Yellow tea's subtle character rewards careful drinking.

- **Special occasion drinking.** Premium specialty experience.
- **Gongfu brewing.** Multiple infusions reveal layered character. More on gongfu.
- **Gift for tea enthusiasts.** Distinctive, rare, prestigious.

Storage

Like green tea but with the yellowing step adding a small amount of stability. Best within 12 months of opening. Airtight, cool, dark.

Buying in the UK

- **Mei Leaf (London).** Specialist Chinese tea retailer; carries premium Junshan Yinzhen and other yellow teas.
- **Postcard Teas.** Premium specialist.
- **What Cha.** Online specialist; rotating inventory.
- **Direct from Chinese tea importers.** For specific premium grade requirements.

Cautions

- **Authenticity.** Real Junshan Yinzhen is rare and expensive. Lower priced "Junshan" teas are often comparable yellow teas from other regions, sometimes simply mis labelled.
- **Brewing temperature.** Boiling water destroys the cup. Always 70-75°C.

FAQ

What is yellow tea? A rare Chinese tea category, slightly oxidised green tea with an extra "yellowing" step. Subtle, sweet, less grassy than green.

What is Junshan Yinzhen? The most famous yellow tea, grown on Junshan Island in Hunan Province. Imperial tribute heritage; rare production; premium pricing.

How does yellow tea differ from green? The "yellowing" step (controlled wrapping for mild non enzymatic oxidation) removes grassiness and adds sweet mellowness.

Caffeine? 20-30mg per cup, slightly lower than typical green tea.

Where to buy in UK? Specialist Chinese tea retailers, teas.co.uk, or the likes of Mei Leaf, Postcard Teas and What Cha, who are trade friends.

Curator's note: yellow tea is one of those rare categories most British drinkers will never try. Junshan Yinzhen is an experience worth having at least once, for the vertical brewing alone. Premium specialty pricing, but the cup justifies it for a special occasion. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

What you need to know: yellow tea and Junshan Yinzhen

Fact	Detail
Category	Yellow tea, rarest of the six, under 1% of production

Fact	Detail
Defining step	Men huang "sealing yellow", mellows grassiness to sweetness
Origin	Junshan Island, Dongting Lake, Hunan; imperial heritage
Cup	Pale gold, sweet, gentle, melon/peach, slightly creamy
Brew	70-75C, tall glass for the standing buds, never boiling
Price reality	Real is £100 to 300+ per 100g and rare; cheap = not real

Reference noted

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

On the practical shopping side: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Have a wander through the tea range; deliveries to UK addresses are free above £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · For this yellow tea, price per cup is the one to watch. Loose leaf mostly wins, and now and then a bag does too.

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