Loose Leaf Tea: Why It Is Better, and Barely Harder

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Loose leaf tea, in summary:** Loose leaf tea is whole or large piece tea leaves sold without a bag and brewed in a teapot or an infuser. The larger leaf has room to unfurl, which gives a fuller, more complex cup that can be re-steeped, and it is barely harder to make than bags.

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

Loose leaf tea is tea sold as whole or large piece leaves with no bag around them. You measure the leaves into a teapot or an infuser, brew them, and strain them out. It is the older format, and it is still how almost all premium tea is sold. Because the leaves are bigger than the broken pieces packed into most tea bags, the cup is more aromatic and more complex, and the same leaves can be brewed more than once.

This page is the background: what loose leaf is, how it differs from a bag, and whether it is really more hassle. For which loose leaf we sell and what each one works out at per cup, see the loose leaf tea we sell and what it costs per cup.

Why loose leaf is better

1. Whole leaves preserve aromatic compounds

Tea bags contain "fannings" or "dust", small broken pieces with maximum surface area. Fast extraction, but volatile aromatic compounds escape rapidly during processing and storage. Whole leaf tea retains aromatics that bags lose.

2. More complex flavour

Whole leaves release flavour gradually, bright top notes early, body in the middle, gentle finish at the end. Tea bags release everything in 60-90 seconds, then mostly extract bitter tannins.

3. Multiple infusions

Quality loose leaf can be steeped 2-3 times (Western brewing) or 4-8 times (gongfu brewing). Each infusion is slightly different in character. Tea bags are 1-and done.

4. Better quality leaf overall

Premium tea is sold loose. Tea bags are usually filled with lower grade processing offcuts. Even mid tier loose tea exceeds premium tea bag tea in cup quality.

5. Less environmental impact

No bag material. Just leaves. Compostable directly. Some tea bags still use polypropylene to seal them, and loose leaf avoids the bag itself. The pouch, label or caddy may still contain plastic, so check the pack.

The "loose leaf is too much hassle" myth

Standard objections, and the reality:

"It takes longer."

It doesn't. The brewing time is the same; you just put leaves in a pot or infuser instead of a bag in a mug. Maybe 30 seconds extra at the start.

"You need special equipment."

You need a teapot (£10-30) OR an infuser basket (£5-15) OR a mesh ball (£3). All of these last years. None require specialist knowledge.

"Cleaning is hard."

Pour the spent leaves into the compost bin (or food waste). Rinse the pot. 30 seconds.

"It's expensive."

Premium loose leaf is more expensive per gram than tea bags, but you typically use less per cup AND can re steep, so per cup cost is comparable. Mid tier loose leaf is competitive with premium tea bags.

Making it, in short

One heaped teaspoon of leaves per cup goes in a teapot or a basket infuser, the water goes on at the right temperature for the tea, and the leaves come out when the time is up. That is the whole difference from a bag, and it is about thirty seconds of it.

Temperatures, steeping times by tea type and what to do about leaves that swim are in the loose leaf brewing guide, and the pots, baskets and strainers themselves are in teapots and infusers.

Loose leaf vs tea bags, by tea type

Tea	Bag suitability	Loose leaf advantage
British black tea (CTC)	Optimised for bags	Modest improvement loose
Earl Grey	Both work	Bergamot more vivid loose
Darjeeling	Acceptable bags	Significantly better loose
Japanese sencha	Suboptimal in bags	Dramatically better loose
Chinese green (Long Jing)	Rarely in bags	Loose only for premium
Oolong	Rarely in bags	Loose only for premium

White tea	Some bagged	Better loose for delicacy
Pu erh	Limited bagged options	Loose or compressed cake

Storage of loose leaf tea

Same principles as tea bags, airtight, cool, dark, away from strong odours. Loose leaf actually has BETTER storage stability than bags because the leaves haven't been broken into fast degrading small pieces.

The cost question

Loose leaf is not automatically dearer than bags. On our own shelf an everyday British black blend in loose form works out at roughly 3.6p to 5.4p a cup, which is about what the same tea costs in bags, and leaf that gives a second and third infusion from one measure goes further still. Specialist single origin and Chinese leaf does cost a good deal more per gram, and for those teas the cup quality is what you are paying for.

FAQ

Is loose leaf tea better than tea bags? Yes, significantly better cup quality, more complex flavour, multiple infusions possible.

Is it more difficult to brew? No, 30 seconds extra time at the start. Pot, infuser, or mesh ball makes it easy.

Best equipment to start? A 600-800ml teapot and a fine strainer, or a basket infuser if you mostly drink one mug at a time. The teapots and infusers guide has the detail.

Where to buy loose leaf tea UK? Our own loose leaf range carries PG Tips, Yorkshire and Dilmah loose leaf. Some major supermarkets stock loose leaf in their premium ranges, and specialist tea merchants carry single garden and Chinese leaf.

Loose leaf vs bags for daily drinking? For weekday convenience, bags. For weekend appreciation or guest quality cups, loose leaf.

Curator's note: most British tea drinkers grew up on bags and never tried loose leaf seriously. The shift is dramatic, same brand, same style, completely different cup quality. Worth investing £20 in a teapot + strainer + mid tier loose leaf to experience properly. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Adjacent teas that pair with this article: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Shop the tea range at teas.co.uk for loose leaf of every kind; UK delivery is free past £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Loose or bagged, the price per cup is what you are really paying. Loose leaf usually wins that sum, and supermarket bags only sometimes match it.

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/