# Matcha: Powder vs Tea Bags vs Ready to Drink

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **The matcha category, in summary:** "Matcha" on a UK shelf means three different products, real whisked powder, mostly-green-tea bags, and sweetened ready-to-drink; knowing which saves money.

*Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in March 2026.*

**The "matcha" category on UK shelves spans three distinct products that share a name but produce very different cups: real matcha powder (whisked traditional), matcha tea bags (steeped, not real matcha), and ready to drink matcha (sweetened, sugar heavy).** Knowing the difference saves money and disappointment.

## The three "matcha" categories

### 1. Real matcha powder (the only real matcha)

Stone ground green tea powder. Whisked with hot water (not steeped). Whole leaf consumption produces high catechin and caffeine per cup. Vivid neon green colour, umami flavour. £15-80+ per 30g depending on grade.

This is what "matcha" actually means traditionally and clinically. More on real matcha.

### 2. "Matcha" tea bags (NOT real matcha)

Tea bags labelled "matcha" but containing green tea blended with a small amount of matcha powder. Steeped like normal green tea. The matcha content is minimal, most of the cup is regular green tea with green colouring and slight matcha flavour. Catechin and caffeine content is similar to regular green tea.

£3-6 per box of 20-25 bags. Much cheaper than real matcha because it's mostly regular green tea.

### 3. Ready to drink matcha (bottled / cans)

Pre mixed matcha latte in plastic bottles or cans. Often heavily sweetened. Convenient but expensive per cup. Quality varies enormously, some use real matcha, some use synthetic matcha flavour with green colouring.

## What's the difference?

| Type | Catechin per cup | Caffeine per cup | Cost per cup |
|---|---|---|---|
| Real matcha (1g whisked) | ~150-200mg | 60-80mg | £0.50-3.00 |
| "Matcha" tea bags (steeped) | ~50-100mg | 30-40mg | £0.15-0.30 |
| Ready to drink matcha | Variable | 30-60mg | £2.50-4.00 |
| Real matcha latte (cafe made) | ~150-200mg | 120-160mg (2g) | £3-5 |

## The marketing problem

"Matcha tea bags" is a misleading term. Real matcha is whole leaf consumption, whisked into hot water, drunk powder and all. Steeping leaves and discarding them isn't matcha style consumption regardless of what's in the bag. The labelling exploits matcha's reputation while delivering a different product.

## When each format makes sense

### Real matcha powder

For:

- People who want the real matcha experience
- Maximum catechin and L theanine intake
- Traditional Japanese tea ceremony
- Café style matcha lattes at home
- Cooking and baking

### "Matcha" tea bags

For:

- Convenience without any whisking
- Drinkers who want some matcha flavour without the price
- Office or travel where whisking isn't practical

In short: this is green tea with matcha flavouring, not real matcha.

### Ready to drink matcha

For:

- Travel
- One off matcha curiosity
- When you don't have time to make any tea

Generally not good value vs making at home. Watch sugar content.

## What real matcha looks like

- **Vivid neon green colour.** Olive green or yellowish suggests stale or low quality.
- **Fine powder texture.** 5-10 microns; barely gritty.
- **Smell of fresh cut grass and seaweed (umami).** Marine, vegetal aromatic.
- **Sold in airtight tins.** 30-100g size most common.
- **Price.** Below £10 per 30g is suspicious for "ceremonial" matcha; quality matcha starts £15-25 per 30g.

### Buying real matcha in the UK

- **Clearspring Premium Ceremonial.** Accessible UK organic option.
- **Matcha & CO, Naoki, Ippodo.** Premium specialist Japanese imports.
- **teas.co.uk, with matcha also at trade friends such as Mei Leaf and Postcard Teas.** UK premium retailers.

### Storage

Real matcha oxidises rapidly. Best within 4-6 weeks of opening. Airtight tin, fridge for opened (return to room temp before use), cool dark cupboard for unopened. More on making matcha.

### FAQ

**Are matcha tea bags real matcha?** No, they contain mostly regular green tea with a small amount of matcha. Different product.

**Why is real matcha more expensive?** Stone grinding takes ~1 hour for 30g of premium matcha. Limited shaded production. Premium grades use first flush spring tea.

**Can I make matcha latte with matcha tea bags?** No, you need real matcha powder for the whisked into milk format.

**Best matcha for beginners?** Clearspring Premium Ceremonial, accessible price, organic, good quality.

**Are ready to drink matchas good?** Convenient but expensive and often heavily sweetened. Make at home for better value.

*Curator's note: "matcha" on a UK shelf can mean three different products at three different price points and three different quality levels. Real matcha powder is the original; the rest are variations on the theme. Worth knowing the difference. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.*

The everyday teas in the same family: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. For more, the full tea shop ships free across the UK over £35.

**FROM THE CURATOR**

*teas* · With matcha in any format, the preparation matters more than the shop. Careful whisking can lift a budget tin past a careless premium one.

### Matcha category reading

Continue with matcha, matcha benefits, how to make matcha, matcha latte and how to judge tea quality.

### 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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