Matcha vs Green Tea: Is Matcha Just Strong Green Tea?

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Matcha vs green tea, in summary:** Matcha is green tea, but shaded, stone ground and drunk whole, which makes it a different drink, not just a stronger one. The real difference.

People often assume matcha is simply concentrated green tea. It is green tea, botanically, but the way it is grown, processed and consumed makes it a different drink, not just a stronger one. Here is the real distinction.

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

Same plant, different everything else

Both are *Camellia sinensis* and both are unoxidised green tea, so at the species level matcha is green tea. But matcha is grown shaded, the method on the shade grown tea page, dried without rolling, and stone ground into a powder you whisk and drink whole, while leaf green tea is grown in sun, rolled, and steeped then discarded. Three big differences, shading, grinding, and drinking the leaf itself, stack up into a different experience, which is why "just strong green tea" undersells it, the fuller version being on the matcha vs green tea page.

Why shading changes the leaf

Shading the plant for weeks before harvest raises the sweet, savoury amino acids (L theanine above all) and lowers the brisk catechins, giving matcha its characteristic smooth, umami, low bitterness profile. An ordinary sun grown green is fresher and grassier but without that brothy depth. So part of the difference is set in the field, before any cup is made, and it is not something a stronger brew of ordinary green can replicate, the point the green vs black page makes about processing deciding character.

Why drinking the whole leaf matters

This is the biggest single difference. With leaf green tea you infuse the leaf and pour the leaf away, drinking only what dissolved. With matcha you drink the milled leaf itself, suspended in the water, so you take in more of everything, more caffeine, more L theanine, fuller body and the vivid colour. That is why matcha gives a stronger, more sustained lift than a cup of leaf green and why a matcha teabag, which steeps and discards, is not really matcha, as the matcha tea bags page explains.

	Matcha	Leaf green tea
Grown	Shaded	Mostly full sun
Form	Stone ground powder	Whole or broken leaf
You drink	The whole leaf, whisked	An infusion, leaf discarded
Caffeine	Higher	Lower to moderate
Taste	Smooth, umami, full	Fresh, grassy, lighter
Preparation	Whisked, 70 to 80C	Steeped, off the boil

The caffeine reality

Because you ingest the whole leaf, matcha delivers more caffeine than a typical cup of leaf green, alongside more L theanine, which is why the lift feels strong but smooth rather than sharp, the dynamic the caffeine in tea vs coffee page describes. It is closer to a moderate coffee than to a gentle green, so it is not the low caffeine choice many assume; for the evening a caffeine free infusion is the better call.

Which to drink, and when

They are not better or worse, they are different tools. Leaf green tea is the light, refreshing, lower caffeine all day cup, gentle and easy and cheap. Matcha is the fuller, more ceremonial, higher caffeine drink, better as a deliberate morning or pre focus cup than as something you sip absent mindedly all afternoon. Many people keep both: leaf green for volume drinking, matcha for the occasional stronger, considered bowl.

How to prepare each properly

Leaf green tea wants water well off the boil, around 70 to 80C, and a short steep; boiling water scalds it bitter, the universal green tea mistake. Matcha is sieved, whisked briskly with a little water off the boil until frothy, and drunk straight, or blended into milk for a latte if it is a culinary grade, the grade split on the ceremonial vs culinary matcha page. Brewing matcha like ordinary green, or with boiling water, wastes exactly the qualities the shading and grinding created.

Texture, ritual and why it feels different

Matcha is whisked to a fine froth and drunk as a slightly thick, vivid suspension; leaf green is a clear, light infusion. The body, the foam, the lingering umami and the small act of whisking make matcha feel like an occasion where a mug of green is a casual drink. That experiential gap is real and is part of why "just strong green tea" undersells it, the occasion logic the green vs black page applies across styles.

Cost, storage and buying sensibly

Matcha is far dearer per gram than leaf green, for real reasons, shading, slow stone grinding, careful storage, and that is exactly why grade and use should be matched: ceremonial to whisk and drink, culinary or latte grade for milk, the split the ceremonial vs culinary matcha page sets out. Using leaf green where you want a cheap all day cup and matcha where you want the considered bowl is the economical reading of the difference.

Ground matcha has enormous surface area and stales fast, losing colour and turning bitter within weeks of opening if warm or exposed; leaf green is more forgiving. So a fresh, well kept mid grade matcha out drinks a stale "ceremonial" tin, and buying small and using quickly matters more than the grade word, the same buy the cup scepticism the what counts as tea page encourages.

Cooking and lattes change the calculus

One place the distinction flips: in cooking and milky drinks you want matcha, not leaf green, because the whole leaf powder carries colour and flavour through milk, sugar and heat where a steeped green simply vanishes. That is why a matcha latte uses powder and a green tea latte is rare and weak. The rule of thumb is powder for anything with milk or heat, leaf for the plain steeped cup, matching grade to use as the ceremonial vs culinary matcha page sets out.

The verdict

Matcha is green tea by species but a different drink by design: shaded, stone ground and drunk whole, which is why it carries more body, colour, caffeine and umami than a steeped cup of leaf green, not merely "more of the same". Neither is better; leaf green is the light, cheap, all day cup and matcha the fuller, occasional, considered one. Keep both for their different jobs, brew each gently, and judge matcha by grade and freshness. Browse our matcha for the whisked bowl and our green teas for everyday drinking, ideally loose leaf green brewed off the boil.

Common questions

Is matcha just strong green tea? No. It is green tea, but shaded, ground and drunk whole, which makes it a different drink, not merely a stronger brew.

Does matcha have more caffeine than green tea? Yes, because you drink the whole powdered leaf rather than an infusion, plus more L theanine for a smoother lift.

Can I make matcha by brewing it like green tea? No; steeping and discarding it defeats the point. Matcha is whisked and drunk whole.

Which is better for all day drinking? Leaf green tea, being lighter and lower in caffeine; matcha suits an occasional stronger cup.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health
- PubMed: Polyphenols and chronic disease prevention

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Matcha-vs-green reading

- The history of tea
- Loose leaf vs teabag
- Tea tasting for beginners
- Tea and caffeine
- Herbal tea
- Green tea
- Tea storage
- Tea ethics & sustainability

Shop the topic

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