Tea Making Mistakes: The Top 10 and the Fixes

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Common tea mistakes, in summary:** The mistakes that ruin most cups are the same six in every kitchen: bad water, wrong temperature, over-steep, stale or cheap leaf, wrong milk, late caffeine.

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

Common tea making mistakes that ruin good tea, such as boiling water on green tea, re boiling kettles, brief steep on Yorkshire Tea, forgetting the bag, wrong storage. Most British tea drinkers make 2-3 of these without realising. Fixing them produces noticeably better cups.

The top 10 tea making mistakes

1. Boiling water on green tea

Green tea bitters at boiling temperature. Use 75-80°C water. Wait 2-3 minutes after kettle boils before pouring.

2. Brief steep on Yorkshire Tea

British black tea needs 4 minutes minimum for proper extraction. 30-second dunk produces thin weak cups.

3. Re boiling kettle water

Re boiled water has lower dissolved oxygen, flatter cup. Boil fresh drawn cold water each time.

4. Wrong temperature for tea type

Each tea type has its right temperature: 75-80°C for green and white; 85-90°C for oolong; 95-100°C for black and herbal. Detailed guide.

5. Forgetting the bag

Stewed tea is bitter. Set a 4-minute timer; remove the bag.

6. Aggressive bag squeezing

Long forceful squeezes extract bitter tannins. Brief 2-second squeeze is the limit.

7. Adding milk before brewing finishes

Milk added during brewing reduces water temperature; stops proper extraction. Add milk after removing the bag.

8. Storing tea above the kettle

Heat and steam degrade tea quickly. Store in cool dark cupboard. More on storage.

9. Using stale tea

Black tea fades over 2-3 years; green tea fades within 6-12 months opened; matcha within weeks. Replace older tea.

10. Adding milk to green or white tea

Milk binds catechins and dulls flavour. Drink green and white tea black.

Brewing specific mistakes

Earl Grey oversteeping

Bergamot oil becomes acrid past 4 minutes. 3-3½ minutes max.

Darjeeling brewed like Yorkshire Tea

Darjeeling needs 2-3 minutes at 90°C. Boiling water + 5 minutes ruins muscatel character.

Matcha with boiling water

Bitters the cup. 70-80°C is right.

Sencha steeped 4+ minutes

Bitter cup. 1-2 minutes max.

Loose leaf without proper infuser

Mesh balls limit leaf expansion. Use basket infuser or teapot.

Storage mistakes

Storing tea in clear glass jar on sunny shelf

UV degrades catechins. Use opaque tin or store in cupboard.

Refrigerating opened matcha

Counterintuitive, condensation each time you remove it accelerates degradation. Room temperature airtight tin once opened.

Storing different teas in same container

Aroma transfer. Earl Grey contaminates plain black; smoky tea contaminates everything.

Storing tea near coffee

Tea absorbs coffee aromatics. Store separately.

Equipment mistakes

Limescale coated kettle

Affects water taste. Descale regularly with vinegar or commercial descaler.

Cheap mesh ball as primary infuser

Limits leaf expansion. Upgrade to basket infuser (£10-15).

Cold mug for tea

Cold ceramic drops water temperature. Pre warm with splash of hot water.

Wide mouth shallow cup

Loses heat fast. Tall narrow cups retain heat better.

Brand specific mistakes

Yorkshire Tea brewed weak

Designed for 4 minutes; full strength. Brewing it weak wastes the blend's character.

Twinings English Breakfast brewed strong

Designed for refined drinking. Over brewing produces bitter cup.

Decaf brewed too short

Decaffeination slightly slows extraction. Brew decaf 4-5 minutes (slightly longer than caffeinated).

Pukka Three Mint with milk

Milk binding doesn't work with mint. Drink black.

Lapsang Souchong with milk

Milk masks the smoke character. Drink black.

Brewing and serving mistakes

Pouring tea over a cold tea bag

Slow extraction. Pour boiling water onto bag (not bag into water).

Stirring continuously during brewing

One gentle stir is fine. Constant stirring extracts unevenly.

Squeezing the bag for "stronger" cup

Extracts tannins, not flavour compounds. Use more tea or longer steep instead.

Drinking forgotten tea

Cold stewed tea is harsh. Discard and start fresh.

Reheating cold tea

Develops off flavours. Make fresh.

Pairing mistakes

Adding milk to delicate tea

Premium green, white, oolong, Darjeeling, all wasted by milk addition.

Sweetening matcha latte too much

Café style matcha latte is heavily sweetened. Home made is better with restraint on sweetener.

Wrong tea with food

Strong Yorkshire Tea overwhelms sushi; delicate sencha gets lost with full English breakfast. More on pairing.

Milk and lemon together

Acid curdles milk almost instantly, so in any black tea choose milk or lemon, never both.

Caffeine mistakes

Drinking strong tea after 4pm and complaining about sleep

Caffeine half life is 5-6 hours. Switch to decaf or herbal late afternoon.

Multiple matcha lattes daily

Each delivers 120-160mg caffeine. 3 daily = 350-480mg, near or exceeding daily limits.

Underestimating chai caffeine

Black tea based chai contains 30-50mg caffeine. Plus milk and sugar make it feel comforting; the caffeine is real.

FAQ

Most common British tea mistake? Boiling water on green tea bags. Single biggest improvement is using cooler water for green tea.

Should I squeeze the bag? Brief gentle squeeze (2 seconds) is fine. Long aggressive squeezing is the mistake.

Why does my tea taste flat? Re boiled water; old tea; storage above the kettle; or right temperature problem.

Why does my tea taste bitter? Probably oversteeped or wrong temperature. Try 4 minutes; right temperature for tea type.

How do I improve my daily cup? Use freshly drawn boiled water; brew the right time; remove the bag promptly; store tea properly.

Curator's note: most British tea drinkers got into a brewing routine at age 18 and never adjusted. Fixing 2-3 of these mistakes transforms every cup. Worth thinking about. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

What you need to know: the most expensive tea-making mistakes

Mistake	Fix
Water not at a full rolling boil	Use a fast kettle; pour the moment it boils
Reboiled flat water	Fresh draw of cold water each time
Wrong temperature for green/white/oolong	Let just-boiled water cool to the right temperature; check with a thermometer or use a temperature-controlled kettle
Over-steeping	Black 3-5 min, green 1-2, herbal 5-7 max
Stale leaf / open tin in sunlight	Airtight opaque tin in a cool dark cupboard
Cheap or supermarket-bottom bags	Trade up to a decent loose or pyramid blend
Milky tea with delicate leaf	No milk on green / oolong / first-flush Darjeeling
Caffeine in the evening	Afternoon cut-off; herbal after 3-4pm

Closer to home, the English tea range and loose leaf range.

Reference noted

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

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Avoid these mistakes and the brewing matters more than the shop. A careful brew of a budget bag can beat a careless cup of a premium one.

Tea mistakes reading

Continue with how to make tea, water temperature for tea, how to store tea, how to judge tea quality, caffeine in tea and milk in tea or not.

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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