Moroccan Mint Tea: The Atay Ritual

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Moroccan mint tea, in summary:** Moroccan mint tea (atay) is gunpowder green tea, fresh spearmint and sugar poured from height; a gesture of hospitality built on three successive glasses.

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

Moroccan mint tea (atay bil naâna) is the defining drink of North Africa, gunpowder green tea brewed strong, fresh spearmint sprigs, generous sugar, poured from height into small glasses. The technique is part of the experience; the tradition has been refined over centuries.

The traditional preparation

Authentic Moroccan mint tea uses:

- **Gunpowder green tea.** Chinese rolled green tea, the strength holds up to heavy sweetening.
- **Fresh spearmint sprigs.** Whole sprigs with leaves, not dried.
- **Lots of sugar.** Traditional preparation is heavily sweetened, 2-4 sugar cubes per small glass.
- **Boiling water.** Strong brewing.
- **Moroccan teapot.** Distinctive curved metal pot with long spout.
- **Small glass cups.** Tulip shaped or short narrow glasses.

The traditional method

1. **Heat the teapot.** Pour boiling water into the metal pot; swirl; pour out.
2. **Add gunpowder green tea.** 1-2 heaped teaspoons per 250ml of finished tea.
3. **"Wash" the tea.** Pour boiling water over; swirl; pour off the first infusion (removes dust and "bitter" first extraction).
4. **Add fresh mint and sugar.** 4-6 fresh spearmint sprigs; 4-6 sugar cubes.
5. **Pour boiling water.** Fill the pot.
6. **Steep 5-7 minutes.** Sometimes the pot is placed back on a low flame.

7. **Pour from height.** Lift the pot 30cm above the glass. The high pour aerates the tea, creates foam, and cools it slightly.
8. **Serve in small glasses.** Drink while very hot, in small sips.

The cultural significance

Moroccan mint tea is more than a drink, it's social ritual:

- **Hospitality.** Offered to all guests.
- **Three glass tradition.** Tea is poured three times. The saying: "the first glass is bitter as life, the second strong as love, the third gentle as death." Each glass is the same brew at progressive infusions.
- **Family gatherings.** A daily habit after meals.
- **Negotiation and meeting.** Business and social discussions traditionally accompany tea.

Why gunpowder green tea

The Moroccan mint tradition adopted Chinese gunpowder green tea via 18th-19th century European trade routes. Gunpowder works because:

- Strong enough to stand up to heavy sweetening
- Tightly rolled pellets brew slowly during the long steep
- Multiple infusions possible (the three glass tradition)
- Affordable for daily consumption at scale

More on gunpowder.

UK approximation

You can make reasonable Moroccan style mint tea at home in the UK:

Easy method (using bags)

1. 1 bag gunpowder green tea + 1 bag spearmint (or Pukka Three Mint) per 200ml.
2. Just boiled water (~95°C).
3. Steep 4-5 minutes.
4. Add 1-2 sugar cubes.
5. Stir; drink.

Pre blended Moroccan mint tea bags

- **Dragonfly Moroccan Mint.** Organic gunpowder + mint. More here.
- **Twinings Moroccan Mint.** Mainstream UK option.
- **Good Earth Moroccan Mint Green.** Budget alternative.

Full traditional method (best result)

Use the eight step method above. Loose leaf gunpowder + fresh spearmint + sugar. It transforms the cup.

Why pour from height?

The high pour does several jobs:

- Aerates the tea (creates foam, desirable in Moroccan tradition)
- Cools the tea slightly during pour (prevents burning the lips)
- Mixes the multi glass progression evenly
- Visual ceremony, part of the host's display of skill

Buying for traditional preparation

- **Loose gunpowder green tea.** Specialist Chinese tea retailers, Asian groceries, Moroccan / Middle Eastern food shops.
- **Fresh spearmint.** Greengrocer / supermarket. Or grow your own (mint is invasive, easy to keep going).
- **Sugar cubes.** Standard.
- **Moroccan teapot (optional).** Specialist Moroccan/Middle Eastern shops or online imports. £15-50.
- **Tea glasses.** Small short glasses or specifically Moroccan tulip shaped tea glasses.

Caffeine

30-40mg per 200ml cup from the gunpowder green tea base.

Use cases

- **After Moroccan / Middle Eastern meals.** The traditional context.
- **Hospitality / entertaining.** Distinctive drink for guests.
- **Iced summer drinking.** Heavily sweetened iced Moroccan style is excellent in summer.
- **Mid afternoon refresh.** Mint cooling + moderate caffeine lift.

Cautions

- **Sugar content.** Traditional preparation is very sweet, adapt to preference.
- **Caffeine.** Moderate green tea caffeine; multiple cups daily within sensible limits.
- **Reflux.** Mint can trigger reflux in some.
- **Pregnancy.** Within NHS caffeine limits is fine.

FAQ

What is Moroccan mint tea? Gunpowder green tea brewed strong with fresh spearmint and heavy sugar. The traditional drink of North Africa.

Why pour from height? Aerates the tea, creates foam, cools slightly, displays ceremony.

How sweet should it be? Traditional preparation is very sweet (4-6 sugars per pot). Modern UK preference may use less.

Caffeinated? Yes, 30-40mg per cup.

Best brand UK? Dragonfly Moroccan Mint for organic; specialist loose gunpowder + fresh mint for traditional preparation.

Curator's note: making proper Moroccan mint tea, poured from height and sweet enough to make British dentists wince, changes how you think about green tea. The combination of gunpowder green's body, fresh spearmint, and unapologetic sugar is unlike any other tea tradition. Worth doing properly at least once. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

In short: Moroccan mint tea (atay)

Element	The note
Tea base	Chinese gunpowder green tea, sturdy and slightly smoky
Mint	Fresh Moroccan spearmint (naâna), generous handful
Sugar	Substantial, traditional; "atay" without sugar is not the drink
Vessel	Berrad teapot, slim ornate glasses
Method	Boiled briefly, poured from height for foam
Number of glasses	Three; first strong, second balanced, third sweet
Hospitality	Centre of welcome; refusing reads as social rejection
UK approximation	Gunpowder + fresh mint + modest sugar + glass cup

More on Moroccan tea

Continue with the Moroccan mint tea ceremony, the Mauritanian tea ritual, gunpowder green tea and green tea.

Reference noted

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

The everyday teas in the same family: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Browse the full tea range; atay ingredients ship without charge to UK addresses on orders over £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Atay costs little per glass, the measure worth using. Loose gunpowder usually beats bags, though supermarket boxes sometimes surprise.

More related guides

- Good Earth Moroccan Mint Green
- Tetley Chocolate Mint Tart: A Dessert Tea Experiment

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