Oolong vs Green Tea: The Partial Oxidation Difference

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Oolong vs green tea, in summary:** Green tea has no oxidation; oolong has deliberate partial oxidation, giving floral to roasted complexity green tea lacks. The range and how to brew each.

Oolong and green tea are often shelved together as "the lighter teas", which hides the one difference that actually defines them: oxidation. Green tea has essentially none; oolong has some, deliberately, and that single fact explains everything else.

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

The defining difference

Green tea is heated almost immediately after picking to stop oxidation, locking in fresh, grassy, vegetal character. Oolong is deliberately allowed to oxidise partially, anywhere from lightly to heavily, before being fixed, which develops flavours green tea never gets: orchid, honey, stone fruit, roasted nut. They share a delicacy and a no milk habit, but oolong is a processed step beyond green, the spectrum the what counts as tea and green vs black pages map.

	Green tea	Oolong
Oxidation	Essentially none	Partial (light to heavy)
Flavour	Fresh, grassy, vegetal	Floral, honeyed to roasted, complex
Re steeping	A few infusions	Many, evolving
Milk	No	No
Water	Off the boil (70 to 85C)	Just off the boil

Why oolong has flavours green tea does not

The partial oxidation, plus the bruising and sometimes roasting in oolong processing, creates aromatic compounds, the orchid and honey notes of a light oolong, the toasted depth of a dark one, that simply do not form in unoxidised green tea. Green tea's appeal is freshness; oolong's is developed complexity. Neither is more advanced; they are different intentions, the same way black differs from green, a parallel the oolong vs black tea page draws from the other side.

The range within oolong

The key thing green tea drinkers should know is that "oolong" is not one flavour. A lightly oxidised, green style oolong is floral and fresh and will feel familiar to a green drinker; a heavily oxidised, roasted oolong is dark, warm and nutty and feels closer to a black. So an oolong can be the gentlest possible step beyond green, or a substantial leap, depending which you pick, which makes it the natural next exploration for someone who already enjoys green tea, the shade grown nuance the shade grown tea page also touches.

Caffeine and the lift

Both sit in a broadly similar, moderate caffeine range, well below a strong black or matcha, with the usual caveat that brewing strength matters more than type, the point the caffeine in tea vs coffee page makes. Neither is a particularly high caffeine drink; both are better thought of as gentle, sippable teas where the reason to choose between them is flavour and the pleasure of steeping again, not stimulant strength.

The re steeping payoff

This is where oolong pulls ahead for many drinkers. A good oolong gives many short infusions that change noticeably cup to cup, a really absorbing session, while green tea typically gives a few gentler infusions before fading, the mechanics on the re steeping page. If you enjoy green tea but find a single cup over too quickly, oolong is the natural upgrade precisely because it rewards the kettle staying on.

How to brew each

Green tea: water well off the boil, 70 to 85C, short steep, do not scald it. Oolong: water just off the boil, a generous amount of leaf, short steeps, and many of them, tasting as it evolves. The shared rule is gentleness, neither takes boiling water or milk well, and the shared mistake is brewing either like a strong black, which wastes the delicacy that is the whole reason to drink them.

Common questions

Is oolong just oxidised green tea? Essentially, in part: green has no oxidation, oolong has deliberate partial oxidation, which creates flavours green tea lacks.

Does oolong have more caffeine than green? Broadly similar and moderate; brewing strength matters more than the type.

Will I like oolong if I like green tea? Very likely, especially a lightly oxidised oolong, which is the natural next step from green.

Do either take milk? No; both are delicate teas drunk without milk, unlike a strong black.

If you want to taste the partial oxidation difference, it is worth browsing our oolong teas beside our green teas, ideally as loose leaf so the oolong can be re steeped through its evolving infusions.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Green tea catechins and human health

- PubMed: Polyphenols and chronic disease prevention

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