Rainforest Alliance Tea: What the Green Frog Means

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Rainforest Alliance certification, in summary:** The Rainforest Alliance green-frog mark is the most-common UK tea certification; environment-first audit of biodiversity, deforestation and labour.

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

Rainforest Alliance certification covers environmental and social standards for tea estates, different from Fairtrade (which focuses on minimum prices and premiums for cooperatives). The two systems address different problems; both have legitimate roles. Yorkshire Tea, Lipton, and others use Rainforest Alliance certification.

What Rainforest Alliance certification covers

For tea producers, the certification requires:

- **Environmental standards.** Biodiversity protection, soil and water management, integrated pest management.
- **Worker welfare.** Decent working conditions, no forced labour, no child labour.
- **Worker housing and healthcare.** Basic standards for estate resident workers.
- **Continuous improvement.** Annual audits and improvement requirements.

The certification is run by the Rainforest Alliance organisation, founded 1987.

Rainforest Alliance vs Fairtrade

Attribute	Rainforest Alliance	Fairtrade
Primary focus	Environmental + social	Economic (price floor + premium)
Minimum price	No	Yes (guaranteed minimum)
Premium for community projects	No	Yes (Fairtrade Premium)
Producer ownership	Often plantation based	Often cooperative based
Audit frequency	Annual	Annual
Used by	Yorkshire Tea, Lipton, mainstream	Clipper, some Pukka, others

Different problems; different solutions. Some producers carry both certifications.

Major UK brands using Rainforest Alliance

Yorkshire Tea (Taylors of Harrogate)

Most range certified. Yorkshire's "Plant a Tree" reforestation programme operates alongside Rainforest Alliance certification.

Lipton (Lipton Teas and Infusions)

Most range certified.

Tetley

Most range certified.

PG Tips

Most range certified.

Twinings

Some lines certified; others use Twinings' own "Sourced with Care" programme.

The critique

Rainforest Alliance certification has limitations:

- **No minimum price.** Workers and farmers may still be paid market rates, which can be low.
- **Plantation focused.** Most certified estates are large plantations rather than smallholder cooperatives.
- **Less rigorous social standards than Fairtrade.** Worker pay and democratic governance less prescribed.
- **"Greenwashing" concerns.** Some critics argue the certification is too easily achieved.
- **Audit-based, not outcome-based.** Audits are point in time, and a 2023 BBC Panorama investigation documented serious labour issues on some certified Kenyan and Indian estates.

The defence

- **Real environmental standards.** The biodiversity protection is real.
- **Better than no certification.** Worker welfare standards exist.
- **Scalable.** Plantation friendly model lets large brands transition; roughly 15-20% of global tea supply is now certified.
- **Continuous improvement requirements.** Standards rise over time.

What "Rainforest Alliance Certified" actually means on a tea box

The frog logo indicates the tea estate(s) supplying the product met certification standards at last audit. Specific guarantees:

- Working conditions meet minimum standards
- Environmental management plans in place
- No prohibited pesticides used
- Workers have basic healthcare access
- No child or forced labour

What it does NOT necessarily mean:

- Workers are paid above market rates
- Communities receive specific premium funding (vs Fairtrade)
- The product is organic (separate certification)

The Yorkshire Tea Plant a Tree programme

Yorkshire Tea operates a tree planting programme alongside Rainforest Alliance certification. Funds reforestation in tea growing regions (especially Kenya). Reasonable additional commitment.

Reading certification labels

- **Frog logo (Rainforest Alliance):** Environmental + basic social standards.
- **Fairtrade logo:** Minimum prices + community premium.
- **Soil Association logo:** Organic.
- **Multiple logos:** Combined standards (e.g. Clipper is Fairtrade + Organic + plastic free).

The bottom line

Rainforest Alliance certification is a real improvement over uncertified production but doesn't go as far as Fairtrade or Organic certification. For environmentally conscious consumers prioritising biodiversity, RA is meaningful. For consumers prioritising worker economic welfare, Fairtrade is stronger. For consumers prioritising pesticide free production, Organic is stronger.

Many consumers value combined certifications: organic + Fairtrade + RA together is the strongest ethical positioning.

FAQ

Is Rainforest Alliance same as Fairtrade? No, different focuses. RA is environmental + social; Fairtrade is economic (price floors + premium).

Is Yorkshire Tea ethical? Rainforest Alliance certified + Plant a Tree programme. Some say "yes"; Fairtrade advocates say "could be more economic focused."

Best certified tea? Combined certifications (Clipper: organic + Fairtrade + plastic free) cover the most bases.

Does RA mean organic? No, separate certifications.

Why do brands use RA over Fairtrade? RA is more scalable for large plantations; Fairtrade is more cooperative focused.

Curator's note: Rainforest Alliance is real if imperfect. Better than uncertified; not as thorough as organic and Fairtrade combined. Yorkshire Tea + Plant a Tree is reasonable ethical positioning; Clipper's organic+Fairtrade approach is stronger. Choose what matters most to you. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

What you need to know: Rainforest Alliance tea

Aspect	The note
What it is	NGO-led farm-certification scheme; the green-frog mark
Founded	1987; merged with UTZ in 2018
Focus	Biodiversity, soil health, worker conditions, deforestation
Vs Fairtrade	Environment-first vs price-floor-first; different but complementary
Common UK brands	Yorkshire Tea, PG Tips, Tetley, Clipper (partial)
Strength	Wide producer reach; meaningful environmental standards
The critique	Audit-based not outcome-based; certification is a floor not a ceiling
Buying signal	Useful baseline; verify with brand-specific sustainability detail

Picks from the same corner: the English tea range and loose leaf range.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Tannins and non-haem iron absorption

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Spend less on prestige, more on freshness. Freshness beats the frog: a box from two months ago outclasses a three year old gift tin.

Rainforest Alliance reading

Continue with Fairtrade tea, sustainable tea, ethical tea, Rainforest Alliance tea, Yorkshire Tea 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

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/