Rooibos: The UK Shelf and What to Buy

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Rooibos, in summary:** UK rooibos shelf survey; Dragonfly leads the premium organic tier; organic certification meaningful for rooibos; the engaged buyer pays the premium.

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

Rooibos (also called redbush tea) is South Africa's caffeine free gift to the global tea world, Aspalathus linearis, a needle leaved shrub native exclusively to the Cederberg region of the Western Cape. Sweet, woody, naturally caffeine free, low tannin, and one of the most versatile herbal infusions on the UK shelf.

The basics

- **Plant:** Aspalathus linearis (rooibos). NOT a Camellia sinensis (real tea) plant.
- **Origin:** Western Cape, South Africa.
- **Format:** Dried red brown leaf material in tea bags or loose leaf.
- **Caffeine:** 0mg, naturally caffeine free.
- **Tannins:** Very low (unlike black or green tea).
- **Flavour:** Sweet, woody, slightly vanilla honey notes.
- **Cup colour:** Distinctive amber red.

The plant

Rooibos is a flowering shrub native exclusively to a small area of South Africa's Western Cape (Cederberg region). The name "rooibos" is Afrikaans for "red bush", referring to the colour the dried leaves turn during oxidation.

The plant grows in poor sandy soils that few other crops tolerate. Attempts to cultivate rooibos elsewhere have largely failed. The terroir really is unique.

How rooibos is made

1. Pluck (whole shoots, including stems and small leaves).
2. Bruise the leaves (releases enzymes).

3. Allow oxidation (turns leaves from green to red).
4. Sun dry.
5. Cut and package.

Production is concentrated in the Cederberg region; most rooibos is sold to international markets.

What rooibos tastes like

Naturally sweet (no sugar needed), woody, slightly vanilla honey character. The cup is amber red, low bitter, satisfying. Drinks well black, with milk, with lemon, or as a base for chai/Earl Grey style blends.

Green rooibos vs red rooibos

- **Red (oxidised) rooibos.** Standard rooibos, the classic version.
- **Green (unoxidised) rooibos.** Lighter, less sweet, more vegetal. Specialty product.

Green rooibos keeps more of certain compounds (oxidation reduces some) but is less commonly available.

The active compounds

- **Aspalathin.** A flavonoid unique to rooibos.
- **Nothofagin.** Another rooibos unique compound.
- **Quercetin.** General flavonoid.
- **Polyphenols broadly.**
- **Trace minerals.**

Health credentials

Real if modest:

- Antioxidant intake
- Some preliminary cardiovascular evidence (animal studies)
- Some preliminary blood sugar evidence
- Doesn't significantly bind iron (unlike black/green tea)
- Naturally caffeine free

Detailed evidence framing.

How to brew rooibos

1. 1 tea bag per 200ml.
2. Just boiled water, rooibos tolerates full boiling. Hard to over brew.
3. Steep 5-7 minutes for full flavour.
4. Drink black, with milk, with a slice of lemon, or as a latte base.

Common rooibos products

- **Pure rooibos.** Single ingredient.
- **Vanilla rooibos.** Dessert leaning.
- **Rooibos chai.** Caffeine free chai. More here.
- **Earl Grey rooibos.** Caffeine free Earl Grey.
- **Honeybush + rooibos.** Combined Cape herbs.
- **Rooibos with fruit.** Strawberry, peach, vanilla, etc.

UK rooibos brands

- **Dragonfly Pure Rooibos.** Organic Cederberg region. More here.
- **Tetley Redbush.** Mainstream supermarket option.
- **Pukka Pure Rooibos.** Organic.
- **Clipper Pure Rooibos.** Fairtrade, organic, plastic free.
- **Specialist single estate rooibos.** Premium retailers.

Use cases

- **Caffeine free real tea style drink.** Drinks closer to tea than typical herbal infusions.
- **Pregnancy.** Rooibos still counts in pregnancy: NHS guidance stops herbal tea at 4 cups a day and says no to liquorice root. Ask your midwife or pharmacist if unsure.
- **Children.** Many South African families serve to babies.
- **Evening drinking.** Caffeine free.
- **Iced summer tea.** Cold brewed rooibos is excellent.
- **Latte base.** A vanilla rooibos latte is very good.
- **Iron deficient drinkers.** Doesn't significantly bind iron.

Caffeine

0mg.

Cautions

- **Allergies.** Rooibos is in the legume family, uncommon cross reactions possible.
- **Hormone sensitive conditions.** Very mild oestrogenic activity at heavy daily intake.
- **Pregnancy.** Rooibos still counts in pregnancy: NHS guidance stops herbal tea at 4 cups a day and says no to liquorice root. Ask your midwife or pharmacist if unsure.

The "rooibos = red tea" naming confusion

Some marketing labels rooibos as "red tea." Strictly incorrect:

- Rooibos is Aspalathus linearis, NOT Camellia sinensis (real tea).
- Chinese "red tea" (hóngchá) refers to Western black tea, fully different category.

More on naming.

FAQ

Is rooibos tea? Strictly no, it's a herbal infusion, not Camellia sinensis. Functionally similar to tea.

Caffeine free? Yes.

Health benefits? Real if modest: low tannin, caffeine free, naturally sweet.

Pregnancy safe? Rooibos still counts in pregnancy: NHS guidance stops herbal tea at 4 cups a day and says no to liquorice root. Ask your midwife or pharmacist if unsure.

Best UK brand? Dragonfly Pure Rooibos or Pukka Pure Rooibos for organic; Tetley Redbush for mainstream.

Curator's note: rooibos is one of the most reliably useful caffeine free drinks you can keep in. Drinks like tea, naturally sweet, hard to brew badly. Worth keeping in the cupboard. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Quick reference: UK rooibos shelf

Brand / tier	The note
Dragonfly (premium organic)	Soil Association organic; named sourcing; £4-£5 per 40 bags
Clipper (mass-market organic)	Fairtrade + organic; widely-stocked; £3-£4 per 40 bags
Teapigs (premium temple-bag)	Whole-leaf temple-bag; £4-£6 per 50 bags
Twinings (mass-market)	Twinings rooibos; not organic; £2-£3 per 40 bags
Whittard (premium loose-leaf)	Loose-leaf rooibos; £5-£8 per 100g
Supermarket own-brand	Tesco / Sainsburys / M&S; not organic; £1.50-£2.50 per 40 bags
Yogi (functional blends)	Vanilla rooibos, chai rooibos blends; £3-£4 per 16 bags
The buying signal	Organic certification + named South African source the premium signal

Picks from the same corner: the rooibos range.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Spend less on prestige, more on freshness. A two month old rooibos pack still beats a gift tin three years old.

Rooibos reading

Continue with rooibos tea, rooibos health benefits, Dragonfly pure rooibos, honeybush tea, caffeine-free tea and the herbal tea family.

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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