Sencha Tea: Japan's Everyday Green

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Sencha, in summary:** Sencha is the Japanese steamed green tea, around 80% of Japanese production; bright green, vegetal-marine, gentle umami; 70-80C brewing.

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

Sencha is Japan's everyday green tea, the most consumed tea in Japan, accounting for around 80% of Japanese tea production. Steamed, rolled into needle shapes, vegetal marine character with distinctive umami. The benchmark Japanese green tea; the cup that defines the category for most drinkers.

What sencha is

Sencha (??) is the steamed Japanese green tea, distinguished from Chinese pan fired greens by:

- Brief intense steaming (10-30 seconds) instead of pan firing
- Rolling into thin needle shapes
- Vivid neon green colour
- Marine vegetal umami flavour profile

How sencha is made

1. Pluck (varies by harvest period; first flush spring is premium).
2. Brief withering.
3. Steam for 10-30 seconds (deactivates oxidation enzymes).
4. Roll into thin needle shapes.
5. Dry.

Steaming time varies, fukamushi (deep steamed, 60+ seconds) sencha has darker colour and fuller body; asamushi (lightly steamed) sencha has paler colour and more delicate character.

Sencha grades

Premium first flush sencha (shincha)

April May harvest, the year's youngest, sweetest leaves. £30-60 per 100g. Limited availability outside Japan.

Standard sencha

Year round production. £15-25 per 100g. Daily driver Japanese green tea.

Lower grade sencha (bancha)

Older, more mature leaves; later harvests. £8-15 per 100g. Affordable everyday drinking.

What sencha tastes like

Vivid green cup. Vegetal grassy character with marine umami undertones. Premium grades are sweeter; standard grades are more straightforwardly vegetal. Drunk black; milk would obliterate the character.

How to brew sencha

1. 1 heaped tsp per 200ml.
2. Water at 70-80°C, NOT boiling. Boiling water bitters sencha.
3. Steep 1-2 minutes.
4. Drink black.
5. Premium sencha yields 2-3 infusions.

The most common British brewing mistake: boiling water + 4-minute steep. Produces bitter, harsh cup. Use cooler water and shorter time.

The temperature trick

For ideal sencha brewing without a variable temperature kettle:

1. Boil the kettle.
2. Pour boiled water into the teapot or another vessel (it loses some heat in the transfer).
3. Check with a thermometer until it is down to about 80°C (how long that takes depends on the amount of water and the vessel).
4. Pour over the leaves.

Sencha varieties worth knowing

Asamushi (light steamed)

Briefer steaming (10-15 seconds). Pale yellow green cup, delicate flavour, more aromatic top notes.

Chumushi (medium steamed)

Standard steaming (20-30 seconds). The everyday sencha most drinkers know.

Fukamushi (deep steamed)

Extended steaming (60+ seconds). Darker green cup, fuller body, more intense umami. Specialty.

Shincha (new tea)

First flush spring sencha. Fresh, sweet, premium. Limited season availability.

Kabuse cha (covered tea)

Sencha shaded for 1-2 weeks before harvest. Mid tier between standard sencha and gyokuro. More umami; less bitter.

Caffeine

30-50mg per 200ml cup. Standard green tea range; premium grades slightly higher.

Use cases

- **Daily Japanese green tea drinking.**
- **Mid morning focus work.** L theanine + caffeine combination.
- **Pairing with Japanese cuisine.** Traditional accompaniment.
- **Cold brewed iced tea.** Excellent. More on cold brew.
- **Multiple infusion drinking.** Premium sencha rewards 2-3 infusions.

The L theanine + caffeine combination

Sencha is high in L theanine, the amino acid responsible for green tea's "alert but easy" cognitive character. Premium sencha (especially shaded variants) has higher L theanine concentrations. More on L theanine.

UK sencha brands

- **Clearspring Sencha.** Organic Japanese; UK distributed. Accessible quality.
- **Yamamotoyama Sencha.** Japanese brand widely distributed.
- **teas.co.uk, with Japanese greens also at trade friends Postcard Teas, What Cha and Mei Leaf.** Premium specialist sencha.
- **Asian groceries.** Often best value.
- **Direct Japanese imports.** Naoki, Ippodo, Marukyu Koyamaen for premium.

Storage

Sencha is delicate. Best within 6-9 months of opening. Airtight tin, fridge for opened (return to room temp before brewing), cool dark cupboard for unopened.

Health credentials

Premium green tea benefits, heart markers, cognitive research and catechin intake. Detailed evidence.

Cautions

- **Caffeine sensitivity.** Standard green tea level.

- **Iron absorption.** Tannins; drink between meals.
- **Pregnancy.** Within NHS caffeine limits is fine.

FAQ

What is sencha? Japan's everyday green tea. Steamed, rolled into needle shapes, vegetal marine flavour.

How is it different from Chinese green tea? Steamed (Japanese) vs pan fired (Chinese). Different cup characters.

Best brewing temperature? 70-80°C. NOT boiling.

Caffeine? 30-50mg per cup.

Best UK brand? Clearspring Sencha for organic accessible; specialist Japanese imports for premium.

Curator's note: sencha is the gateway to Japanese green tea, the everyday drink that defines the category. Brewed properly (75°C, 2 minutes), it's one of the great daily teas globally. Worth investing in. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

In short: sencha tea

Aspect	The note
What it is	Japanese steamed green tea; the everyday Japanese green
Process	Steamed (not pan-fired), rolled, dried; the Japanese signature
Volume share	Approximately 80% of Japanese tea production is sencha
Brewing temperature	70-80C (well below boiling); for umami extraction
Cup character	Bright green, vegetal-marine, gentle umami; grassy-sweet
L-theanine	High; the "relaxed focus" amino acid
Caffeine	Modest; 20-30mg per cup, lower than black tea
Buying signal	Named Japanese origin (Uji, Shizuoka, Kagoshima); whole-leaf

More on Japanese green tea

- Japanese green tea
- Matcha
- Kabusecha
- How to make tea properly

Reference noted

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

Teas in the same conversation: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. Pop into the tea shop for every other Japanese green; UK shipping is free from £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Everyday sencha is best judged by its price per cup. Loose sencha nearly always wins, though bags sometimes come close.

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- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
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