Sencha: Origin, Harvest and Style

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Sencha, in summary:** Sencha varies meaningfully by origin (Uji, Shizuoka, Kagoshima) and harvest (shincha, ichibancha, nibancha); named-region-and-harvest is the signal.

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

Sencha is Japan's everyday green tea, accounting for 60-70% of Japanese tea production. The defining feature is steam fixing, a quick steam treatment instead of pan firing, which produces vivid green colour, vegetal umami flavour, and the distinctive needle shaped rolled leaves.

Sencha basics

- **Origin:** Japan (with growing Chinese and Vietnamese production)
- **Process:** Steamed and rolled
- **Cup colour:** Vivid yellow green
- **Flavour:** Vegetal marine, umami, slightly grassy
- **Caffeine:** 30-50mg per cup
- **Best brewing temperature:** 70-80°C

The history

Sencha as we know it dates to 1738, when tea master Nagatani S?en developed the modern Japanese steaming technique in Uji (Kyoto). Before this, Japanese green tea was processed differently. S?en's method, quick steaming followed by rolling, became standard and is still used today.

Sencha replaced earlier Japanese tea forms (matcha precursor tencha) as the everyday drinking tea. Matcha continued for ceremonial use; sencha for everyday.

Steaming variations

Asamushi (light steamed)

10-15 second steam. Pale yellow green cup. Delicate, more aromatic top notes. Specialty grade.

Chumushi (standard steamed)

20-30 second steam. The standard sencha most drinkers know. Balanced character.

Fukamushi (deep steamed)

60+ second steam. Darker green cup, fuller body, more intense umami. Specialty grade. Often associated with Shizuoka region.

Sencha by harvest period

Shincha (new tea)

First flush spring sencha. April May harvest, the year's youngest leaves. Sweet, premium, limited season. £30-60 per 100g.

Ichibancha (first flush)

Same as shincha, the year's first harvest.

Nibancha (second flush)

June harvest. Mid tier; less premium than first flush.

Sanbancha (third flush)

July harvest. Standard everyday sencha.

Yonbancha (fourth flush)

September harvest. Lower grade; often used in commercial bottled tea or genmaicha base.

Major Japanese sencha regions

- **Shizuoka.** Largest sencha producing region. Produces around 40% of Japanese tea.
- **Kagoshima.** Southern Japan, warmer climate, large modern production.
- **Uji (Kyoto).** Historical heart of Japanese tea; premium sencha.
- **Yame (Fukuoka).** Premium gyokuro and sencha.
- **Sayama.** Specialised pan fired sencha (a Japanese rarity).

The active compounds

- **EGCG and other catechins.** Antioxidant.
- **L theanine.** The focus amino acid; higher in shaded teas.
- **Caffeine.** Standard green tea level.
- **Vitamin C, A, B complex.** Trace amounts.
- **Chlorophyll.** Vivid green colour.

How to brew sencha

Standard brewing

1. 1 heaped tsp per 200ml.
2. Water at 70-80°C (NOT boiling).
3. Steep 1-2 minutes.
4. Drink black.

Premium sencha (multiple infusions)

1. 1 heaped tsp per 100ml (concentrated).
2. Water at 70°C.
3. First infusion: 1 minute.
4. Subsequent infusions: 30-45 seconds each, increasing.
5. Yields 2-3 infusions; each subtly different.

Cold brew

Excellent for sencha. 4 tea bags + 1L cold water; fridge 6-8 hours. Smoother, naturally sweet, no bitterness.

The L theanine advantage

Sencha contains meaningful L theanine (10-30mg per cup). Combined with caffeine, it gives a composed, alert focus. Premium first flush sencha has higher L theanine; deep steamed variants extract more.

Caffeine

30-50mg per 200ml cup. First flush premium grades slightly higher (40-50mg). Lower grade bancha lower (20-30mg).

Storage

Sencha is delicate. Best within 6-9 months of opening. Airtight tin essential. Fridge for opened (return to room temperature before use).

UK sencha brands

- **Clearspring Sencha.** Organic; UK distributed. More here.
- **Yamamotoyama Sencha.** Mainstream Japanese brand.
- **teas.co.uk, and for premium sencha, our trade friends Postcard Teas and Mei Leaf.** Premium specialty.
- **Direct Japanese imports.** Naoki, Ippodo for premium.

Use cases

- Daily Japanese green tea drinking
- Mid morning focus work
- Pairing with Japanese cuisine

- Cold brewed iced summer drinking
- Tea tasting / appreciation

FAQ

What is sencha? Japan's everyday green tea. Steamed, rolled, vegetal umami flavour.

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

Multiple infusions? Premium sencha yields 2-3 infusions.

Caffeine? 30-50mg per cup.

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

Curator's note: sencha is the everyday Japanese green tea worth investing in. Brewed at the right temperature, it's one of the great daily teas globally. Worth keeping a tin in the cupboard. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

The essentials: sencha by region and harvest

Aspect	The note
Uji (Kyoto)	Premium-tier; top-grade sencha and gyokuro
Shizuoka	Largest volume producer; everyday-tier sencha
Kagoshima (Kyushu)	Second-largest; fukamushi (deep-steamed) specialty
Shincha (first flush)	Early May; bright vegetal aromatics
Ichibancha	First harvest; highest quality of the year
Nibancha	Second harvest June-July; mid-tier
Bancha	Lower-grade later-harvest leaf; everyday tier
Asamushi vs Fukamushi	Shallow vs deep steaming; different cup profiles

Pair it with the green tea range and matcha range.

Reference noted

- Encyclopaedia Britannica: Tea (history)

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Start with a cheap everyday sencha and stay there until something stops you. Most rich teas reward patience, not budget.

Sencha reading

Continue with sencha tea, sencha explained, Japanese tea, gyokuro, Uji tea and Shizuoka tea.

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
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