

TEA



the second most popular drink in the world

leaves of the Camellia sinensis plant

Art and science in every cup

Tea is the most widespread beverage in the world after water. However, tea is not merely a drink—it is a ritual that connects people across cultures and continents. From its humble beginnings in China thousands of years ago, tea has become a symbol of hospitality, health, and meditation. Its composition and preparation can be both an art and a science.

History and culture

Tea has a long and rich history that dates back to ancient China. Legends tell of Emperor Shennong, who discovered tea around 2737 BC when a leaf from a tea tree accidentally fell into his hot water. Over time, tea became an integral part of Chinese culture and, from the 8th century onward, spread to Japan and other parts of Asia.

In different parts of the world, tea carries different rituals and meanings. In Japan, for instance, the preparation of matcha tea is tied to a ceremonial approach with an emphasis on aesthetics and mindfulness. In Britain, tea symbolizes hospitality and social gatherings.



Types

Tea comes from the leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant, but there are countless ways to process these leaves, resulting in many different types of tea. The most common are:

Green Tea

Sometimes referred to as unfermented tea, its production methods are varied, but in general, green tea does not undergo oxidation like black tea. There are no universal quality scales for green teas, but the first harvest is usually considered the finest.

Black Tea

The most common type of tea, its production consists of four steps: withering the tea leaves, rolling (usually done mechanically, though by hand for the highest quality teas), oxidation (often referred to as fermentation), and drying. Drying stops the oxidation process, and the timing of this step determines the tea's final quality—the oxidation must end at precisely the right moment. Afterwards, the leaves are sorted by size, which can serve as a clue when selecting a tea. Black teas are often named after the leaves they contain, the growing region, or the specific plantation.

Yellow Tea

Often called imperial tea, it is essentially a green tea that is repeatedly moistened and dried while wrapped in paper or cloth. This process extracts bitter tones, leaving only a sweet flavor. The production process is lengthy, so only limited quantities are made, which is reflected in its price. In the past, the best teas delivered to the Chinese imperial court were known as yellow teas.

Oolong Tea

Also known as semi-green or blue-green tea (from the Anglicized Chinese name Wu-lung—"black dragon"), oolong undergoes varying degrees of oxidation, from about 10% to 70%, resulting in a wide range of flavors and colors. Oolongs can be divided into light varieties, which typically have rolled leaves and often contain stems, and dark (more oxidized) varieties, which usually have loose leaves. Oolongs oxidized by more than 50% are sometimes referred to as brown or five-colored teas.

Production steps include withering the leaves under direct sunlight, then gently bruising them to start oxidation, which primarily occurs at the edges of the leaves while the intact parts retain their natural polyphenols.

White Tea

Made primarily from fuzzy buds and the first few leaves. There are four quality grades of white tea:

Yin Zhen - first leaf (Silver Needle)

Bai Mu Dan - white peony - second and third leaves

Gong Mei - fourth leaves

Shou Mei - fifth and sixth leaves

After a brief withering, the leaves are gently shaken on trays to slightly bruise them, causing mild oxidation that is quickly stopped by steaming or drying. Because of this gentle processing, white tea retains most of the chemical compounds and vitamins found in fresh tea. White teas can age and are suitable for long-term storage.

Pu Ehr

This is a post-fermented tea, either naturally or artificially aged. It is named after the city of Pu'er in China's Yunnan province and is made from a large-leaf variety of the Yunnan tea plant. The leaves are sun-dried, kneaded, and briefly pan-heated to stop oxidation. They are then steamed and pressed, triggering post-fermentation that allows the tea to mature over time.

Two main types exist: Shu (dark) and Sheng (green), which differ in their post-fermentation methods.



Flavored Teas

It is very common for teas to be scented with essential oils, flowers, fruits, or spices. So-called “scented teas” are flavored naturally—by drying with flowers—while “flavored teas” may include essences of natural or artificial origin.

Herbal Infusions (Non-Teas)

The term “non-teas” collectively refers to all beverages not made from tea leaves and generally free of caffeine, though rich in other beneficial substances. These include various plant and herbal blends from around the world, such as Honeybush, Rooibos, Lapacho, and Maté.

Although all true teas come from the same plant, their taste and aroma depending on several factors:

- *Variety of the plant: *Camellia sinensis* (Chinese tea plant) and *Camellia assamica* (Assam tea plant).*
- *Growing location: altitude, climate, and soil quality.*
- *Harvest time: depends on both the season and the plant's vegetative stage.*
- *Processing method and degree of oxidation.*
- *Preparation: amount of tea leaves, water quality, water temperature, steeping time, and number of infusions.*



Tea Preparation:

There are generally two basic preparation methods: either place the leaves directly into the water or use a vessel or strainer that allows easy removal of the leaves afterward.

The water used should be fresh and preferably soft. It must always be boiled before brewing. Keep it boiling only briefly to preserve acidic compounds that help release the tea's distinctive aroma.

Temperature

Different teas need to be brewed with water at different temperatures. In general, we can say that white teas are brewed with water at a temperature of 75°C, green teas at 80°C, semi-green teas at 85°C, black teas at 95°C and pu-erh teas at 95-100°C.

These are very approximate figures, as each tea is individual and can be prepared in many ways: depending on the combination of water temperature, steeping time, number of infusions and amount of tea.

Amount of tea

In general, we use 2-3 grams of tea leaves per 200ml of infusion (that is approximately one teaspoon).

The steeping time varies for each tea. Green teas are usually steeped for 2-3 minutes, black teas for 3-5 minutes. Some Japanese teas can be steeped for less than one minute.

Other infusions: Quality teas can usually be steeped for two to three times and still taste great.

Tea Aging

Oxidation is the process by which tea leaves react with air. To intensify this process, the surface of the leaves is often mechanically disturbed. The degree of oxidation determines whether the tea will be black or green.

Health Benefits

In addition to its delightful flavor, tea offers numerous health benefits. It contains polyphenols—powerful antioxidants—and caffeine, which can enhance alertness and concentration. Studies suggest that regular tea consumption may reduce the risk of heart disease, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease.

Tea and Caffeine

All teas derived from the *Camellia* plant contain caffeine. The amount varies depending on many factors. One cup (200 ml) of tea contains approximately 40 mg of caffeine. Unlike in coffee, caffeine in tea is not free but bound, resulting in a slower and milder effect on the human body.

Tea in Gastronomy

Tea has recently become increasingly popular not only as a beverage but also as an ingredient in culinary creations. Tea leaves are used to prepare aromatic sauces, desserts, and even meat dishes. For example, Earl Grey adds a distinctive flavor to desserts, while matcha is often used in baking and ice cream making.





Tea Is More Than a Beverage



It is a union of history, culture, health, and culinary art. Whether enjoyed during a traditional Japanese tea ceremony or as part of a modern dessert, tea has the power to bring people together and create moments of peace and joy.