

Tea Dictionary

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Basic Tea Definitions

Afternoon Tea: Refers to a British meal taken mid afternoon, comprising of sandwiches, scones, and pastries accompanied by tea. The 7th Duchess of Bedford is believed to have started the traditional afternoon tea in the early 19th century.

Artisan teas: Often refers to premium, full-leaf white, green, and black teas that are hand-sewn into intricate blossoms or rosettes; they require no tea bag or strainer and "bloom" when steeped; sometimes referred to as flowering teas, peonies, or anemones.

Anhui : One of the major tea producing regions in China.

Assam: This state in India is the largest tea-producing district in the world and is best known for its variety of black teas.

Autumnal: Teas harvested in autumn. The term is typically associated with teas from India and Formosa.

Black tea: The foremost tea sold worldwide. Prepared from green tealeaves that have been allowed to fully ferment and wither. Brews a reddish-orange or reddish-brown infusion.

Blend: Two or more varieties of tea blended together.

Brick tea: Common grades of Chinese and Japanese tea mixed with stalk and dust and molded into bricks under high pressure. Originally these bricks were used by Asian travelers as convenient way to transport the tea. Tea bricks were also used to barter for trade goods.

Caffeine: A stimulant contained in tea, which can boost the heart rate and alertness and, in elevated quantities, can lead to restlessness or insomnia.

Camellia sinensis: Botanical name given to the tea bush.

Caravan tea: Tea taken by camel from China to Russia before modern transportation.

Ceylon: These black teas are from Sri Lanka, one of the largest tea exporters worldwide.

Cha: The word for the Chinese and Japanese character referring to tea.

Chai: A popular tea drink made from strong black tea, milk, sugar, and spices.

Chanoyu: The Japanese tea ceremony, literally meaning "hot water tea," which celebrates the beauty and mundane aspects of everyday life.

Chunmee: Chinese green tea, with the shape resembling human eyebrows.

Congou: A general term used to describe all Chinese black teas regardless of the area in which they are grown and made.

CTC: stands for Crush, Tear, and Curl, a machine-based process which macerates the leaves by pressing through counter-rotating rollers to create a stronger, more coloury tea.

Darjeeling: This tea district in northeast India is best known for its brisk and floral black teas.

Dust: The smallest and usually lower quality grade of tea commonly used in commercial teabags.

Earl Grey: A black tea scented with citrus oil from the Bergamot orange.

English breakfast tea: A brisk and lively black tea, traditionally Keemun from China and often including China congou blends and Ceylon blends. These teas are frequently served with milk and sugar.

Fair trade teas: A tea that is certified by an international agency as having been grown on a farm that is part of a Fair Trade working cooperative. Fair Trade certification works to allow farmers to warrant a fair price for their goods and at the same time upholds specific standards for the wages and living and working conditions of its workers. Fair Trade coffees are labeled as such.

Fanning: Small, grainy particles of leaf sifted out of better grade teas.

Firing: The method of rapidly firing the tealeaf with hot air or in a hot pan in order to quickly cease fermentation and dry the leaf.

Flavored tea: Tea that has been scented and flavored with spices or flavors, which may include cinnamon, orange rind, or Bergamot oil, to name a few.

Flush: Refers to the timing of the tea harvest. "first flush" is the early spring plucking of new shoots. "second flush" is harvested late spring through early summer, yielding more body and full flavor. Autumnal flush is the late season harvest.

Formosa or Formosa oolong: An Oolong tea produced in Taiwan, which is considered the champagne of tea.

Genmai cha: A green Japanese tea with roasted rice.

Grades: The category indicating the tealeaf size and the preparation style.

Green tea: A tea produced in China, Japan, and Taiwan. Prepared from green tealeaves that have been neither fermented nor withered and are then fired to cease fermentation. Brews a pale, greenish-yellow infusion.

Gunpowder: A style of green tealeaves from China that are rolled into pellets and dried, which then open up when steeped.

Gyokuro: A high grade Japanese tea produced by a special process in the Uji district of Japan. It is made from tea grown on shaded bushes which increase chlorophyll content.

Hyson: A type of Chinese green tea meaning "flourishing spring". Young Hyson is this type of tea which is plucked early.

Jasmine: A black tea scented with jasmine flowers.

Keemun: A fine grade of black tea produced in China, usually hand rolled and fired. One of China's best-known premium teas.

Kenya: A fine black tea produced in Africa.

Lapsang Souchong: A black tea produced in China that has been fired over pine root and is known for its smoky aroma and taste.

Matcha: A powdered green tea produced in Japan that is used in the Japanese tea ceremony.

Oolong tea: A tea produced in China and Taiwan. Prepared from tealeaves that have been partially fermented and withered. Brews an amber infusion.

Orange pekoe: Indicating a larger grade of whole black tealeaf, specifying only size and not quality or flavor.

Orthodox: prepared using a technique which leads to leaf styles mirroring hand-produced teas.

Pan-Fired: A kind of Chinese and Japanese tea that is steamed then rolled in iron cauldrons over charcoal fires.

Organic teas: A tea that is certified by an international agency as having been grown free of chemical pesticides, fertilizers, or herbicides and labeled as such.

Pekoe: Indicating a smaller grade of whole black tealeaf, specifying only size and not quality or flavor.

Pouchong: A tea produced in China and Taiwan. Prepared from tealeaves that have been partially fermented. Typically used as the base tea for scented teas.

Pu erh: An aged tea produced in the Yunnan province of China. Prepared from tealeaves that have been specially fermented to produce an earthy characteristic.

Rooibos: A caffeine-free herb produced in South Africa that steeps to a rich reddish infusion.

Scented tea: A base black, green, or oolong tea combined with flower petals or blossoms, herbs, or even sliced fruit or fruit peel for a distinct flavor and aroma.

Sencha: The green tea variety produced in Japan, consisting of a wide array of qualities.

Souchong: Indicating a larger grade of whole black tealeaf, specifying only size and not quality or flavor.

Tea taster: A tea expert who can judge a cup-sample for character and quality and provide knowledge about its value, blending, and production.

Tisane: Dried herbs or fruits are infused in water and often called "Herbal Tea". Because Tea leaves from the Camellia Sinensis plant are not used, these beverages often do not contain caffeine.

Vintage: Used to describe teas from the same harvest at market.

White tea: A tea produced mostly in China. Prepared from green tea leaves that have been withered and then fired. Brews a pale greenish, almost clear infusion.

Yixing: Located near Shanghai, this city in Eastern China is world renowned for their purple sand teapots.

Yunnan: This tea district in southwest China is best known for its spicy black teas.

Tea Taster Terms

Aroma: The fragrance or smell of steeped tea, ranging from faint to full to flowery and more.

Astringency: The drying sensation of the gums and tongue, which gives a tea its refreshing characteristic.

Bakey: Black teas that have been over fired may take on this unpleasant burnt flavor.

Bergamot: The essential oil from the fragrant Bergamot orange, which is used as a flavor base for making Earl Grey tea.

Biscuity: A pleasant baked aroma of a well-fired tea. Used primarily to describe Assam teas.

Bitter: A twinge or strong sensation noticeable at the back of the tongue.

Black currant: The berry-evoking aroma and taste. Used to describe many fine Darjeelings.

Body: The weight of a tea's infusion as perceived in the mouth. A tea may have thin, medium, or full body.

Bold: Particles of leaf which are too large for the particular grade.

Brassy: Black teas that have been under withered may take on this unpleasant acidic tang.

Bright: A fresh and vibrant quality, characteristic of all fine teas.

Brisk: A lively, astringent quality, characteristic of all fine teas, not flat.

Character: The flavor and aroma linking a tea to its country, region, district, or estate of origin.

Chocolaty: A roasty, sweet aroma suggestive of unsweetened chocolate that's used to describe certain fine Darjeelings.

Clean: The quality of a thin, plain tea that finishes smooth in the mouth and has nothing unfavorable about it.

Complex: Flavors that have multiple layers of sensation.

Curly: Leaf appearance of whole leaf grade teas such as OP, as distinct from 'wiry'.

Delicate: Restrained flavors and aromas that are neither strong nor intense.

Earthy: The pleasant aroma or flavor of moist soil or earth. Teas that have been stored in a damp environment may take on an unpleasant earthy taste.

Fine: A quality tea in terms of astringency, flavor, aroma, and overall positive characteristics.

Flat: A dull, lackluster tea, deficient in astringency and briskness.

Flavor: The taste or notes found in the tea's infusion, which may vary from nutty to flowery and more.

Flowery: An aroma suggestive of flowers.

Fresh: A positive trait used to describe newly processed teas with vibrant flavor and aroma.

Fruity: A sweet aroma or flavor suggestive of peaches, grapes, currants, or apricots.

Full: Indicating strong character, in terms of color and concentration, and little briskness.

Grassy: An herbaceous aroma or flavor suggestive of alfalfa or grass.

Grainy: Describes primary grades of well-made CTC teas such as Pekoe dust.

Harsh: A negative characteristic describing a bitter, unpleasant, or offensive taste or sensation.

Hay: A stinky aroma or flavor suggestive of wet hay or straw.

Heavy: Indicating strong color and concentration but little briskness.

Herbaceous: An herbal aroma or flavor suggestive of herbs, leaves, or plants.

Light: Indicating a thin character, in terms of color, body, and aroma.

Lively: Pleasingly vibrant in astringency and briskness.

Malty: A sweet barley flavor used to describe certain Assam teas.

Metallic: An unfavorable trait used to describe a coppery tang in black tea.

Muscat: A fruity, grapey flavor. Used to describe certain fine Darjeelings.

Nutty: A roasty aroma or flavor suggestive of almonds, cashews, etc.

Pine: An aroma suggestive of fresh-cut pine.

Pungent: A strong and penetrating sensation in the mouth, characteristic of teas with good briskness or astringency.

Point: Fine and focused flavor, aroma, liveliness, or briskness.

Rich: A full-bodied tea that finishes with a depth and complexity of flavor and an overall pleasing taste.

Self-Drinking: Indicating a tea that has well-rounded quality and flavor and does not require blending.

Smoky: An aroma or flavor suggestive of wood smoke, ash, baking, etc. Used to describe certain Keemun, Gunpowder, and Lapsang Souchong teas.

Smooth: Indicating lively character but little pungency, not flat.

Spicy: A fragrance or flavor reminiscent of spices like cinnamon, allspice, black pepper, or incense.

Stale: Tea that has not been stored properly or has too long a shelf life may take on this flat, one-dimensional papery flavor.

Strength: Indicating strong character in terms of color, concentration, body, and pungency.

Sweet: The quality of a light, pleasing tea that has nothing unfavorable or superior about it.

Tangy: An intensely piercing sweet and sour impression along the sides of the tongue.

Tarry: A heavy, smoky aroma or flavor. Used to describe certain Lapsang Souchong teas.

Thick: Liquor with good colour and strength.

Tippy: teas with white or golden tips, indicating high quality.

Toasty: The pleasant baked or bisquity aroma of a well-fired tea. Used to describe fine Keemun teas, some Darjeelings, or other high-fired teas.

Vegetal: A vegetative aroma or flavor suggestive of seaweed, herbs, or grass. Used to describe most green teas.

Winey: Having the mature, fruity essence of a fine red wine.

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