

Making Tea

If you're using tea leaves, making a good cup of leaf tea involves observing a few principles, some of which also apply to teabag teas:

Fresh water

The first rule is always to use freshly drawn water – for the best flavour, the water should be well oxygenated, and the more often it is boiled the less oxygen it contains. If you want to be a connoisseur about it, filter the water before boiling, or, even better, don't use tap water at all but choose a bottled water that gives the results you want (some have more minerals and salts than others and these come out in the flavour).

Amount

As a rule of thumb, use 1–2 teaspoons per 230 ml (8 oz) cup and adjust according to preference. Or follow the ratio, suitable for most teas, of 2–3g of tea to 180ml (6 oz) of water, allowing for the fact that the recommended volume of tea will vary with the size, shape and density of leaf. Bulkier leaf teas will need a greater volume per serving than small, dense leaves.

Brewing method

Loose leaves in a teapot or mug allow for maximum freedom for the leaves to unfurl, and a more flavourful cup. If the tea infuses for longer than its ideal time, however, the tea can become bitter. You can avoid this by using a basket filter (they come in cup and teapot sizes) or a tea sock and removing the infused leaves at just the right moment. Tea balls and mesh infusers do a similar job, but don't allow the same degree of circulation.

Water temperature

Remembering that water boils at 100 °C (212 °F), delicate teas are scorched if you use water straight from a boiled kettle, and most teas will release too many tannins and become bitter. Allow the water to cool a little before pouring onto the leaves.

<i>tea</i>	<i>cooling time</i>	<i>target temperature</i>
WHITE TEAS	rest for 5 minutes	71–76 °C (160–170 °F)
JAPANESE OR CHINESE SPRING GREEN TEAS		
STANDARD GREEN TEAS	rest for 3 minutes	76–82 °C (170–180 °F)
YELLOW TEAS		
OOLONG TEAS	rest for 2 minutes	82–93 °C (180–200 °F)
BLACK TEAS	rest for 1 minute	88–93 °C (190–200 °F)
PUERH TEAS	use immediately	93–100 °C (200–212 °F)

If the water isn't hot enough, the tea will taste flat. A water thermometer will give you more exact results.

If you are going to steep the same leaves more than once, Asian-style (good quality teas can be steeped a few times – see below), you can increase the temperature a bit each time.

Steeping

Steeping leaves need to be left alone as excess motion causes the release of more tannins, which makes for bitter-tasting tea. It also helps to cover the tea as it steeps: the leaves will unfurl more uniformly and the finished tea will taste better.

Unless the tea packet gives you guidelines, steeping time is a matter of trial and error until you discover the ideal time for any particular tea. Start with 1–3 minutes and increase the time gradually to your preferred taste. Oolong teas can benefit from 5–7 minutes, black teas and green teas 2–4 minutes, white teas 1–2 minutes and yellow teas about 90 seconds, depending on the individual tea.

If you want to steep Asian-style (different flavours and nuances are released at each steeping as the water penetrates further into the leaf), white, green and yellow teas allow from 1 to 3 steepings, depending on the tea, and oolongs can be steeped 4–8 times or more. Black teas are generally best steeped only once. With puerh tea, the first steeping is poured off and multiple steepings follow (up to about 10, sometimes 15 or more), increasing from 30 to 90 seconds.

Milk and sugar?

Leaf teas are best drunk without milk, apart from the stronger black teas such as Darjeeling, Assam and Ceylon, which are just as good with milk, and Kenyan tea, which is nicer with. Adding sugar – or lemon – is a matter of personal taste.

Tea Etiquette

Tea is drunk pretty much worldwide. The way in which it is prepared in different countries varies greatly, and so does the depth of ritual associated with it. In some countries it is mainly the method of preparation that has distilled over time – for instance in Russia, where every home has a samovar for heating the water used to dilute the strong, bitter concentrate kept in a small teapot on top. In Morocco, minted green tea is poured from an exaggerated height into small, delicate glasses – a flamboyant trick allowed by the long and slender curved spout of the Moroccan teapot.

In other countries, more complex rituals are observed, made up of many layers of history, culture and social custom. There are traditions in Korea, Tibet, Egypt ... but the most famous must be the Chinese tea ceremony, or, far more elaborate, the Japanese. In China, it is the tea that matters – and the social interaction: the participants smell the tea, taste it and savour and enjoy the many layers of flavour discovered with every mouthful, expressing the search for beauty in the everyday that is at the centre of Tao philosophy. It involves a peaceful atmosphere, incense, flowers, soft music and songbirds – and light, entertaining conversation. The Japanese ceremony reflects the spirit of Zen philosophy, in which spiritual elevation is attained by engrossing yourself in the smallest details of daily life. Every element is rigidly prescribed, from the way to greet guests, to the design of the kimono, the gestures, phrases and actions required, the flower arrangements, the teaware, the brewing method and the architecture of the tearoom.

Slightly less extreme but no less particular are the manners associated with taking tea in the British "drawing room".

In the British tradition, tea used to be served at about 4 o'clock. Nowadays, in the UK, the USA and Europe, it is likely to be served at any time between about 3 and 5 p.m., with or without the small sandwiches, pastries, biscuits, cakes and scones that historically bridged appetites between lunch and dinner. In 18th- century Britain, you might fall from grace entirely if you didn't know the correct form. Today, it is still expected that tea should be drunk in an elegant manner, following unspoken rules:

- If you are pouring the tea, pour each cup about two-thirds to three-quarters full, ask if the drinker wants milk or lemon and/or sugar, make sure there is a teaspoon on the saucer if they do (not if they don't), then hand it to the drinker before pouring the next cup, as it cools very quickly.

Don't ever: *Fill the cup to the rim.
Put the teaspoon ready in the cup.
Pour out several cups of tea before handing them round.*

- Add the sugar before the lemon or the milk. Sugar cubes are preferable. The lemon should be thinly sliced, and preferably delivered into the tea by a small fork, by either the pourer or the drinker, from a small dish. The slice of lemon should be removed before pouring a second cup of tea.

Don't ever: *Drop the sugar in from a height so it splashes.
Put the lemon in before the tea, or put it on the edge of the saucer.*

- Pour the milk in after the tea. (It used to be poured first to protect the china from the heat of the water, but this is no longer necessary.)

Don't ever: *Have both milk and lemon.*

- When drinking from a cup and saucer, put your index finger through the handle, your thumb on top of the handle, and your second finger below the handle. The remaining two fingers should naturally follow the curve of the other fingers and should not stick out. Steady the saucer in your other hand by resting your thumb on the rim.

Don't ever: *Stick your little finger out to balance the weight of your teacup.
Cradle the teacup in your hand.
Swirl the liquid around in the cup.*

- If you have added milk or sugar, stir gently and noiselessly by moving the teaspoon back and forth in the centre of the cup. Put the teaspoon back in the saucer behind the cup, with the handle of the spoon pointing towards the cup handle. Envisaging the saucer as a clock face, the handle of the cup should be positioned at 4 o'clock.

Don't ever: *Clink the teaspoon against the edges of the cup.
Stir in an enthusiastic swirling motion.
Leave the teaspoon in the cup when you sip.
Sip from the teaspoon.*

- If you are drinking your tea with lemon, either you or the pourer will add the lemon slice from the dish. If you want a second cup of tea, the lemon should be removed and a fresh slice added, always after the tea has been poured.

Don't ever: *Take the lemon slice out of the tea before the cup is empty.
Use your teaspoon to squeeze the lemon against the side of the cup.*

A teabag should never be served in a cup of tea.

Useful Measures and Conversions

1 U.S. fluid ounce	1.0408 imperial (UK) fluid ounces	0.0296 liter
1 U.S. liquid gallon	0.8327 imperial (UK) gallon	3.7854 liters
1 U.S. liquid quart	0.8327 imperial (UK) quart	0.9464 liter
1 imperial (UK) fluid ounce	0.9608 U.S. fluid ounce	0.0284 liter
1 imperial (UK) gallon	1.2009 U.S. liquid gallons	4.5460 liters
1 imperial (UK) quart	1.2009 U.S. liquid quarts	1.1365 liters
1 imperial (UK) pint	20 imperial (UK) fluid ounces	0.5683 liters
1 liter	33.8140 U.S. fluid ounces	35.1951 imperial (UK) fluid ounces
1 liter	0.2642 U.S. liquid gallon	0.2200 imperial (UK) gallon
1 liter	1.0567 U.S. liquid quarts	0.8799 imperial (UK) quart
1 liter	1,000 milliliters	

U.S. liquid measures

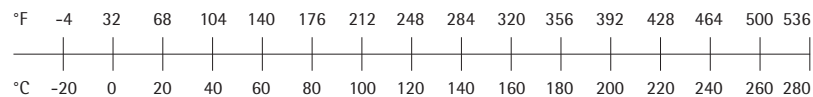
1 cup	8 fluid ounces (1)	1/2 pint	237 milliliters	16 tablespoons
2 cups	16 fluid ounces	1 pint	473 milliliters	
4 cups	32 fluid ounces	1 quart	946 milliliters	
2 pints	32 fluid ounces	1 quart	946 milliliters	
4 quarts	128 fluid ounces	1 gallon	3.785 liters	
8 quarts	one peck			
4 pecks	one bushel			
dash	less than 1/4 teaspoon			
1 teaspoon	1/6 fluid ounce	5 grams	about 5 milliliters	
1 tablespoon	1/2 fluid ounce	15 grams	15 milliliters	3 teaspoons
2 tablespoons	1 fluid ounce	28.35 grams	29.57 milliliters	1/8 cup
8 tablespoons	4 fluid ounces	1/4 pint	118.28 milliliters	1/2 cup

(1) water only: 1 cup = 8 fluid ounces = 8 ounces weight

U.S. dry measures

1 pinch	up to 1/8 teaspoon			
3 teaspoons	1 tablespoon	1/2 ounce	14.3 grams	
2 tablespoons	1/8 cup	1 fluid ounce	28.35 grams	
4 tablespoons	1/4 cup	2 fluid ounces	56.7 grams	
5 1/3 tablespoons	1/3 cup	2.6 fluid ounces	75.6 grams	
8 tablespoons	1/2 cup	4 ounces	113.4 grams	1 stick butter
12 tablespoons	3/4 cup	6 ounces	.375 pound	170 grams
16 tablespoons	1 cup	8 ounces	1/2 pound	226.8 grams
32 tablespoons	2 cups	16 ounces	1 pound	453.6 grams
64 tablespoons	4 cups	32 ounces	2 pounds	907 grams

temperature



°F = (°C x 9/5)+32 °C = (°F -32) x 5/9

tea



- black ☐
- green ☐
- white ☐
- oolong ☐
- ... ☐

amount per cup



water temperature



steeping time



preparation notes

tea



- black ☐
- green ☐
- white ☐
- oolong ☐
- ... ☐

amount per cup



water temperature



steeping time



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