

A Guide to World Teas



Time for tea!

Around the world millions of cups of tea and coffee are made and drunk every day. The rise in popularity 10 to 15 years ago of coffee bars and specialist coffees made the public thirsty for more knowledge of where their coffee was coming from, the types of coffee beans used and what techniques and equipment could make the ultimate cup of coffee.

The last few years has seen tea, the nation's favourite drink, fight back. The drinking of tea has not only become extremely fashionable but has also been credited with being very good for us. For many, tea is more interesting than coffee and the virtue of its widely differing flavours from type to type can allow restaurants to differentiate their products from their competitors.

In this guide, compiled with the assistance of Imperial Teas of Lincoln, we offer advice on making the perfect cup of tea. We also highlight the variety of teas and the equipment and techniques needed to bring out the differing flavours.

Why not make a cup of tea and sit back and read the Lincat Guide to World Teas?

Tea - the world's favourite drink

In many respects the production of tea is just as complex, if not more so, than the production of wine. But compared to its more glamorous counterpart, tea is given little or no consideration on most menus or in the way it is served. However, change is afoot and this neglected drink, though the world's most widely drunk, is now being recognised by consumers as having so much more to offer. We hope that when you have read this brief guide you will be encouraged to experiment and offer your customers some of the very best tea and flavours in the world.



Did you know?

- Over 700 billion cups of tea are brewed a year – and this doesn't include China!
- It takes over 75,000 leaf and bud sets to produce just one pound of tea

How to make the perfect cup of tea

The most vital ingredient – the quality of the water!

To achieve the perfect cup of tea, attention must be paid to its preparation and for this we must start at the very beginning of the process and perhaps with the most vital ingredient - water! However good the tea we use and the better the tea the more significant this is, it can only be fully appreciated if the water we use is close to perfection. It is vital therefore to use water which is free from taint and odour. More than any beverage, tea suffers when made with poor water. Its fragrance, flavour and appearance in the cup will be greatly enhanced by the use of filtration.

Filtration is also recommended by many to remove unhealthy contaminants from tap water. This is especially so since tea is widely accepted as a healthy drink, perhaps even healthier than water alone. So always use filtered water to make the best possible tea.

How hot is hot water?

Many people don't realise that different teas need varying water temperatures. Whilst most black and red teas need boiling water, most of the others do not. Some Green and White teas for example should be made with water which has been heated to just 70°C.

Different temperatures can be achieved through the use of separate boilers or kettles set to different temperatures, and it's worth making the effort to get this just right. The difference in flavour and fragrance of green tea made with the correct temperature of water is rather like the difference between serving red wine at room temperature or chilled!

So, with filtered water at the right temperature, you are on the right track to producing tea as it should be tasted.

Lesson time!

Next we need to learn how much tea to use and how long to infuse the leaves. Whilst personal preferences vary we can offer some broad guidelines, which are outlined in the 'Tea Descriptions' section below. Please remember though that length of infusion, whilst being to some degree personal, can spoil the finest tea, either through over or under extraction.

It's a good idea to use a device, such as a removable infuser, in the teapot to allow control over this. You can remove the leaves before serving the drink or leave them for the customer to remove. The latter is in many ways better and more fun as it engages the customer in the process and as a result makes the experience more memorable. Only a small degree of training is required to learn infusion times for different teas or this can be explained through information on your menu.



Which tea?

The final ingredient in the quest for the perfect cup of tea is of course the tea itself. It stands to reason that the higher quality the tea, the better it will taste. The most prestigious teas are sold at well over £100 a pot in many fine teahouses, hotels and restaurants throughout the world! The cost of the tea in this price is negligible; the profit margins are handsome!

Varieties, flavours and brewing

Tea offers an incredible array of varieties and flavours and we certainly won't be able to do them all justice here. What follows however is a brief guide to the main groups of tea.

All tea comes from the *Camellia Sinensis* plant, which has over 3000 'varietals'. As you can imagine, this alone offers up many subtle variations in characteristics when combined with the place they are grown. Differences can even be noticed between different bushes growing in the same garden!

Nevertheless, the most notable difference in flavour with any of these varieties is the method of processing after it is picked. Broadly speaking there are six processing methods, which vary in terms of oxidation. When a leaf is rolled, twisted or crushed it releases enzymes, which on contact with the air begin to oxidise and turn the leaf a familiar dark brown colour - the tea we know as 'black' tea.

This process, which requires great skill, is often mistakenly termed 'fermentation'. However in the hands of a 'Tea Master', it can produce the most exquisite of teas.



Green Tea

This variety, becoming increasingly popular owing to its much lauded health benefits, undergoes no oxidation. The leaves are steamed, or otherwise heated, immediately after plucking to prevent this. Green tea offers many different flavour characteristics ranging from the light and flowery China types to the more intense Japanese varieties. They are very refreshing and the highest qualities contain more of the health giving polyphenols than any other type.



Preparation

Green Tea should be made with 70-85°C water, using 2.5g of tea per cup and brewed for two minutes. The same leaves may be replenished with water three to four times.



Oolong Tea

This is the largest group of teas and presents the most diverse range of flavours. Its partial oxidation, usually between 10% and 80%, needs careful control to bring out the required character of the tea. In the hands of a Tea Master this means the production of arguably the most complex and exquisite teas in the world. The famous Oolong teas are made in the Wuyi, Phoenix and Anxi mountains of China and most notably on the island of Taiwan. The teas made there are among the most expensive and sought after in the world. It would be unfair to attempt to cover the great range of characteristics in such a short space but on tasting a great Oolong, it's hard to believe it is made from the same material as any other tea with its unparalleled fragrance and lingering flavour.



Preparation

This tea should be made with 95-100°C water, using 2.5g of tea per cup, infused for one to two minutes. The same leaves can be replenished with water three to four times.



Black Tea

We are most familiar with this type of tea, particularly in Britain and it is made by completely oxidizing the leaf. Black teas are the only type suitable for taking with milk and offer the most robust and full-bodied cup of tea. Within this category, the country of origin and variety of tea will greatly influence the flavour in the cup. From the flowery, fragrant teas of Darjeeling and Ceylon, to the heavy, malty teas from Assam and China, black tea offers many delicious infusions.



Preparation

These teas should be made with 95-100°C water, using 2.5g of tea per cup and infused from two to six minutes.



White Tea

This is a sub category of green tea and is very rare, mostly produced in the Fujian Province of China, although Darjeeling is now making some very fine types too. It is made with a strain of tea known as Da Bai or 'Big White' and is merely sun dried to halt oxidation. It is a very mild tea with a sweet, herbaceous fragrance and a high content of healthy polyphenols.



Preparation

White Tea should be made with 75°C water, using 2.5g of tea and infused for two minutes. The same leaves can be replenished with water three to four times.



Yellow Tea

This is the most rare variety of tea due to its complicated and time-consuming process, of which little is known. It requires up to five days to make and relies upon an instinctive feel by the Tea Master who processes it. This prevents the 'grassy' note found in green tea developing and produces a very mild, smooth infusion. The world's rarest tea, Jun Shan Silver Needles is the most famous 'Yellow' variety.



Preparation

Preparation of different types of yellow tea varies. The world's rarest tea, Jun Shan Silver Needles, should be made with 70°C water, using 2g of tea and infused for one to five minutes. The same leaves can be replenished with water three times.



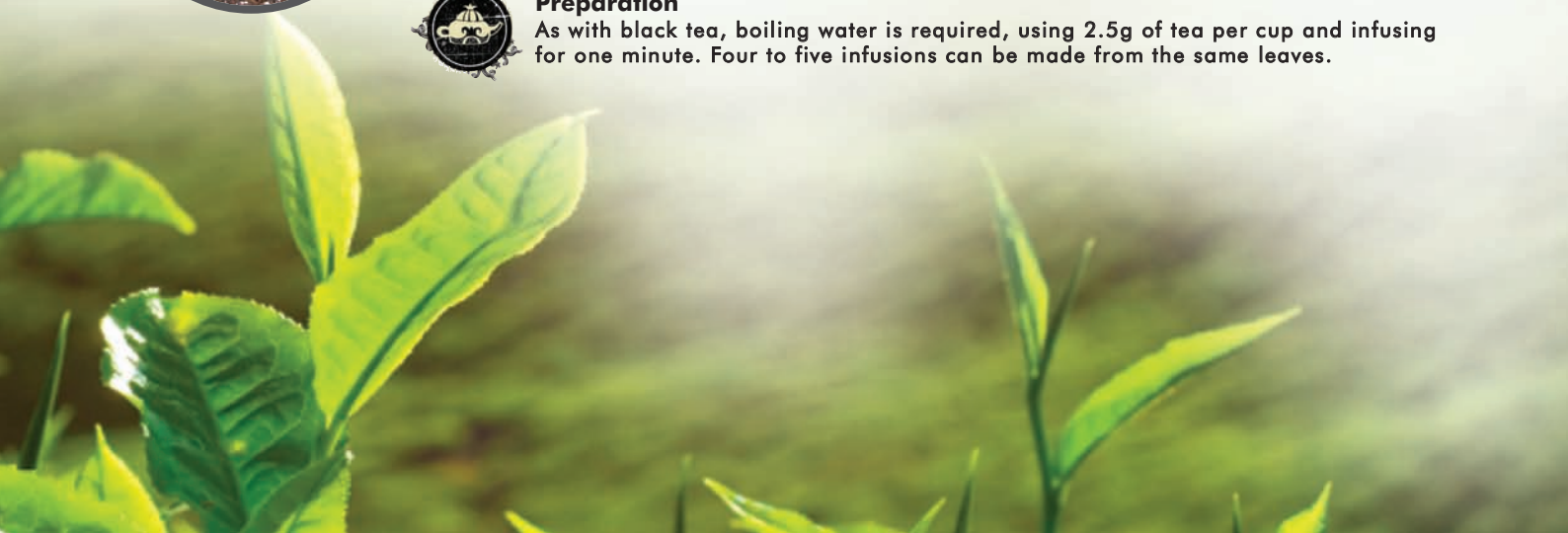
Red Tea

The name for this tea is Pu Erh, after the town in China where it is still largely produced. It is believed to be a very healthy tea and has gained recently in popularity after Victoria Beckham claimed it was the thing that kept her slim! This aside, it has a long history of consumption in China and in its most sought after form, is the most expensive tea in the world. The interesting thing about the processing of this tea is that the oxidation takes place through long storage and happens due to microbial action.



Preparation

As with black tea, boiling water is required, using 2.5g of tea per cup and infusing for one minute. Four to five infusions can be made from the same leaves.



Well there you have it, the Lincat Guide to World Teas. We hope you've enjoyed it and that it's inspired you to look again at the tea on your menu. And remember a great hot drinks offering will certainly drive food sales. So take a moment to make that perfect cup of tea, sit down and start planning. Good luck!

We are extremely grateful to Ben Poole for his assistance in compiling this guide. Ben founded Imperial Teas of Lincoln in 1991 with the aim of the bringing the very best tea in the world to the U.K. Today, Ben's expertise is highly sought by tea growers keen to improve the quality and position of their product in the, thankfully, expanding market of truly exceptional teas.

For more information on the huge variety of teas available log on to Ben Poole's website:

www.imperialteas.co.uk

