

PURE TEA

Tea Types and Quality

Origins

Tea is believed to have originated in the southwest of China and is produced from varieties of the *Camellia Sinensis* plant. Its recorded history dates from over 2000 years ago. Tea is now grown all over the world, with the main tea producing countries for quantity and quality being China, India, Sri Lanka, Japan, and Taiwan.

Types of Tea

According to Chinese classification, the six main types of tea are:

- White – minimally processed, Origin: Fujian, China
- Green – non-intentionally oxidised, Origins: China, Japan
- Yellow – ‘smothered’ green, Origins: Anhui and Sichuan, China
- Oolong – semi-oxidised, Origins: Fujian, China and Taiwan
- Black – fully oxidised, Origins: China, Africa, India, Sri Lanka
- Pu’erh – fermented and aged, Origin: Yunnan, China

There are also scented, flavoured and spiced teas. These usually have a base lower grade black or green tea and may include natural or artificial fruit, flower or spice flavours (or pieces).

Black Tea Quality

The best teas in the world are generally agreed to come from India’s Darjeeling, China’s Yunnan and Sri Lanka’s Uva provinces. Tea grown in cooler temperatures of high altitudes restricts the growth of the plant and therefore concentrate the flavour.

Each country has its own system for naming and grading black teas. The gradings are based on the quality and condition of the tea leaves themselves. The classifications below describe grading of black teas (particularly from India and Sri Lanka) in order of quality:

- D: Dust (lowest quality)
- F: Fanning
- S: Souchong
- P: Pekoe
- OP: Orange Pekoe
- BOP: Broken Orange Pekoe
- FOP: Flowery Orange Pekoe
- FBOP: Flowery Broken Orange Pekoe
- GFOP: Golden Flowery Orange Pekoe
- TGFOP: Tippy Golden Flowery Orange Pekoe
- FTGFOP: Finest Tippy Golden Flowery Orange Pekoe (highest quality)

Top-quality pekoe grades consist of only the leaf buds, which are picked using the balls of the fingertips. At the lower end of the scale, fannings are small pieces of tea that are left over after higher grades of tea are gathered to be sold and dust are even smaller particles.

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White and Green Tea Quality

Unlike black tea, white and green teas have no internationally recognised standard for grading. Terms such as 'premium' or 'imperial' may be used in attempts to indicate a higher grade of leaf.

Tea-like beverages

There are a number of beverages that are colloquially known as teas but are in fact not 'true' teas as they are not derived from the *Camellia Sinensis* plant. These include:

- Herbal Tisanes or Infusions - such as Peppermint and Chamomile
- Rooibos - derived from a native South African legume