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January 2026 Newsletter

? Varieteas of Teas ?

Greetings Adventurers!

One of the most magical things about tea is that even though all teas derive from the same [Camelia sinensis](#) plant, there is a seemingly endless variety of teas to explore.

That's because changing how tea is harvested (or even *when* tea leaves and tea buds are picked during the plant's life cycle), or how the leaves are cut, dried, withered, prepared and even packaged leads to very different flavors and experiences.

Which is precisely why our Tea Master [holds special weekly gatherings](#) to encourage and teach others about the craft and ritual of Chinese gongfu tea. After all, nearly all teas, from [green teas](#) to [Pu-erh teas](#), originated in ancient China. In fact, "*sinensis*" translates to "from China."

Learning about gongfu tea is an exciting quest to embark on! But it *can* be a bit overwhelming. So, we offer you this general guide to some of the most common Chinese teas available and a few of the ancient methods used to create them.



Green Tea

Though mostly associated with Japan, [ceremonial matcha](#) – the powdered tea that is frothed into a delightful brew with a special whisk – actually originated from the Tang dynasty in China. And though it is by far the most famous green tea, we invite you explore other Chinese green tea varieties.

Chinese green tea is the most ancient of all teas, and there are thousands of different varieties.

Green tea is unique amongst Chinese teas in that it is not oxidized at all, but heated by either pan-frying or steaming immediately after being harvested.

Never the less, there's an endless number of ways green tea leaves are prepared. For example, to create one of the most traditional Chinese green teas, [Dragon Well](#) tea, the leaves are rolled flat and pan-fried.

Other green teas are processed by rolling the harvested leaves into tight curls or spirals. And still *other* green teas are beguiling, like [GPT's Master's Green Tea](#). This tea defies expectations by being calming instead of energizing!

Learn more about The Tea Tavern's green teas [here](#).



Black (Red) Tea

What we call *black tea* in the West is known as *hong cha* (??) in China — [literally “red tea.”](#) In most cases, this is because of the color of the tea once steeped, such as with our [Jin Ju Mei](#) tea, the brew can look a bit like Western black teas, though the darkness of the brew can vary. The lighter color of the Jin Ju Mei tea is due partly due to the fact the leaves are harvested from the Wuyi Mountains in the Fujian Province during the early spring.

On the other end of the color spectrum (at least within Chinese red teas) is [Black Phoenix](#), a very dark tea that most Westerners would look at think of as a traditional black tea. This blend gets its bold, cacao flavor from a highly specific process of oxidation and roasting.

Not to be outdone in adding a colorful name to the “red” tea spectrum, Nepal has its own version of a Chinese red tea, the [Tinjure ‘Golden Black’ Ilam](#), which is hand picked and minimally processed by the [Tinjure Tea Cooperative](#). True to its name, this tea more closely resembles a golden elixir than a red or black brew, however.

Whatever color is revealed in the cup, however, we can assure you Chinese “red” teas are always offer comfort and warmth.

Explore all of The Tea Tavern Chinese Red teas [here](#).



Oolong Tea

Sitting between green and black teas is Oolong tea. A favorite amongst tea drinkers, Oolongs can be anything from light and fruity to slightly woody and rich. All, however, are created using highly specific oxidation methods.

Take [Bird King Da Hong Pao](#), for example. Tea leaves foraged from the ancient, 400- to 800-year-old indigenous Bird King trees in Guizhou were roasted twice in accordance with Tea Master Lian’s family tradition. In a region well known for its centuries of tea craftsmanship, Master Lian and his daughter applied Da Hong Pao methods from Fujian to leaves that had been resting since August, resulting in a wholly new flavor profile and experience.

Another perfect example of the craftsmanship that creates a perfect cup of Oolong tea is the [Phoenix High Mountain Oolong](#). The leaves are harvested from trees that defiantly grow amidst the craggy rocks of the cool mountainsides in the northern Guangdong Province. Each tea tree grove is cultivated to emulate specific flavors of various flowers and fruits. Once harvested, the leaves are oxidized for a highly specified amount of time using the wulong method.

Find your perfect Oolong tea [here](#).



?? White Teas

White tea is the most delicate of all — lightly processed and soft on the palate. Each cup of white tea is a story of heritage, culture, and gently extracting new flavors and experiences from ancient methods.

Other white teas are prepared as delicately as the brew they yield. The Himalayan tea leaves harvested to make [Phidiam White Prakash](#) - extra fuzzy to protect them from the cold - are simply air dried, yielding a light and delicate flavor that contrasts with the harsh environment in which the trees grow.

Another impressive example of coaxing flavor from nearly-untouched tea leaves is the [Aged Master's White](#) tea. Harvested at Pan Yin Mountain by our friends at [Grass People Tree](#) from Bird King trees that are anywhere from 400 to 600 years old, this tea is processed using 100 percent natural, ancient methods without artificial heat and humidity by Master Lin in 2016. In comparison to other white teas, that means an extra long withering, or drying, time, sometimes done in the shade or at night specifically to lengthen this part of the process. All this is done to help the signature floral notes of white tea blossom even more.

? Explore a range of White teas with our [Wild Tea Sampler](#).



? Pu-erh & Hei Cha (Fermented) Teas

Pu-erh teas, most simply put, are black, fermented teas known for a variety of bold, more assertive flavors (though some can have whispers of floral notes). Of course, as with all Chinese tea craftsmanship, there are different methods of fermentation and preparation that are all steeped in their own traditions and regional cultures.

This is reflected in the wide variety of colors pu-erh and Hei Cha teas are available in. From the midnight black of the assertive [Tei Ji Shu Pu-erh](#), which uses a “pile fermentation” method to the cheerful bright red of [Aini Bamboo Shu Pu’erh](#), traditionally processed in a section of cut bamboo, this category of tea is an entire quest of its own within the tea enthusiast world.

Explore our Hei Cha & Pu-erh Teas, including samples, [here](#).

? Where to Start?

If you’re just beginning your tea adventure:

- Start with a lighter **Green or White tea** if you love delicate notes.
- Try **Oolong** to experience layered complexity.

No matter your taste, Tea Tavern offers carefully selected loose-leaf teas, sustainably sourced and crafted for delightful brewing. You can sample teas to find your perfect cup.

Or, join the [Traveling Tea Tavern](#), our monthly gathering during which people learn about the ancient ritual of gongfu steeping, share stories and laughter, and enjoy tea with other Adventurers!

Make starting easy with our [Adventurer’s Brewer Kit](#). Everything you need to begin exploring tea at home!

Feb/Mar: The Magic of How It's Made: One Tea, Infinite Processes

Hello Travelers!

As you learn about begin to prepare your own [Gongfu tea](#), some ancient truths will begin to reveal themselves: while origin, cultivar, and terroir matters, it's how the tea is processed that determines the tea's category and ending flavor.

This is why all true Chinese teas come from same *Camellia sinensis* tree but there are still several categories of tea. What differentiates white from green, oolong from black, or raw from ripe Pu-erh isn't the plant itself — it's what happens to the leaf after harvest (and, sometimes, *when* the leaves are harvested).

Processing includes several parts: oxidation, withering, shaping, aging, and microbial activity (fermentation). There are thousands of possible technique and timeline combinations possible so it should come as no surprise many Chinese tea plantations or even families have developed their own specific processing methods to create their specific “brand” of tea.

Today we're exploring six primary Chinese tea categories, specifically through the lens of [Gongfu preparation](#).

[White Tea](#) (白茶) — **Controlled Withering & Minimal Intervention**

White tea processing is deceptively simple – it's often called “minimally processed” but make no mistake: its processing is still highly technical.

White tea basically has only two processing steps: harvesting and withering. Fresh buds and/or young leaves are plucked and then allowed to wither (or sit out on a tarp, in a cave, or other designated area) for an extended period of time. During withering, moisture content decreases while enzymatic activity begins transforming amino acids and aromatic compounds.

Sounds simple, but when, for how long, and where the withering takes place can drastically alter the aroma, color and flavor of the tea.

For example, white teas are traditionally withered in shaded, well-ventilated environments, but a notable exception to this rule is [Charcoal Roasted Silver Needle](#) tea by Li Yanmei, a tea master in

Funding.

For that tea, buds for that tea are harvested before they even open and then withered for a longer-than-usual time in the shade. So far, so good. But then the withering process is finished in the sun

Unlike other teas, white teas are made without rolling or pan-firing the tea leaves. Instead, oxidation occurs naturally and lightly during this slow dehydration phase.

White teas are particularly well suited to Gongfu style brewing because the extended withering deepens aromatics and softens the texture of the leaves. This becomes particularly noticeable when brewed using the short, concentrated infusions that is the hallmark of Gongfu.



Green Tea (??) – Shaqing & Preservation of Freshness

Green tea is defined by *kill-green* (??, shāqīng) — the application of heat shortly after plucking to halt enzymatic oxidation. This step preserves chlorophyll - hence the green color - amino acids like L-theanine, and volatile compounds responsible for vegetal and chestnut notes.

In China, shāqīng is often achieved through pan-firing or baking rather than steaming (steaming is more common in Japanese teas). Once heated, the leaves are shaped — often in ways specific to the particular tea; they may be twisted, flattened or curled — and then dried.

One of the best examples of an intricate green tea process is [Dragon Well Tea](#). Declared the official tea of the royal court by Emperor Qianlong during the Qing Dynasty, this light, fresh tea exemplifies all the hallmarks of green tea craftsmanship.

Even the harvesting is specific, with exactly one bud and two leaves getting plucked from the tea tree. The leaves are then withered in the sun and then fix, shaped and dried over heat in a pan.

Green teas tend to have an umami note because the oxidation is halted early though like all Chinese teas a range of flavors and aromas are possible. Gongfu brewing specifically highlights their texture and minerality, but that does require lower temperatures and short infusions.



Oolong Tea (???) — Orchestrated Partial Oxidation

Oolong processing is known for a wide range of oxidation, anywhere from roughly 10% to 70% depending on the process used. It is among the most complex in Chinese tea craftsmanship and some varieties, such as [Yellow Twig](#), even require extra attention and effort when brewing (but are well worth it!).

Generally speaking, oolong tea leaves are first sun-withered, then moved indoors for a series of resting and shaking cycles. During shaking (yaoqing), the leaf edges are gently bruised, encouraging oxidation at the margins while preserving a greener interior.

Oxidation levels can range roughly from 10% to 70%, depending on style. After reaching the desired oxidation point, the leaves undergo kill-green to halt the process, followed by rolling and, often, roasting.

[Bird King Da Hong Pao](#), is roasted twice in accordance with a the family tradition of Tea Master Lian in Guizhou. The tea itself is foraged from indigenous Bird Trees that are that are 400- to 800-years old and have been protected by the Miao people for centuries.

Lightly oxidized oolongs emphasize florals and high aromatics; heavily oxidized and roasted styles develop deeper fruit, honey, or caramel notes. The difference can be start and apparent even just by looking at the leaves themselves. Gongfu brewing is particularly suited to oolong because repeated infusions reveal its layered processing.



Black/Red Tea (??) — Full Oxidation

In Chinese classification, black tea is called *hong cha* (red tea), referring to the liquor color. Black/Red Chinese teas are all fully oxidized before drying, making them the most assertive teas in the Chinese canon.

Full oxidation is achieved by first withering the leaves so they are pliable and then rupturing the cell walls of the leaves by twisting or rolling them. That triggers full oxidation by exposing enzymes in the tea leaves to oxygen. The rich colors - ranging from inky black to deep amber hues - come from catechins converting into theaflavins.

Unlike heavily roasted teas, black teas typically emphasize fruit, malt, cocoa, or honeyed profiles, but there is still a range of flavor and color within the vast black tea family. For example, [Jin Jun Mei](#) (a “red” tea) is known for a light, fruity flavor whereas [Black Phoenix](#) has a more bold, cacao-like taste.

Gongfu brewing a black tea is especially enjoyable because the flavor of the tea can transition from bright top notes in early steeps to deeper sweetness later on.



Dark Tea & Pu-erh (黑茶 / 普洱) — Post-Fermentation & Aging

Dark teas differ fundamentally from other categories due to microbial fermentation.

Raw ([sheng](#)) Pu-erh begins as a green-style maocha that is sun-dried but not fully stabilized. Over time — years or decades — natural microbial activity transforms the leaf, deepening flavor and smoothing bitterness. One of the Tea Tavern’s most happy accidents was discovering [1995 “Green Pu-erh” tea](#), which – as the name suggests – has been fermenting since 1995. The result! A smoky undertone reminiscent of BBQ sauce!

Ripe ([shu](#)) Pu-erh undergoes an accelerated fermentation process called *wo dui*, where leaves are piled, moistened, and carefully turned to encourage microbial development under controlled conditions. One of the best examples of this method is the luxurious [Tei Ji Shu Pu-erh](#) tea which is wet fermented for a very specific amount of time.



As you refine your Gongfu practice, try tasting across categories while focusing on how processing expresses itself in the cup — from the bright immediacy of green tea to the layered depth of aged dark tea.

Or, come to a [Traveling Tea Tavern meetup](#) and watch the process unfold for yourself! You can ask questions, meet like-minded tea lovers and sample new teas!

April 2026 - Making Water: Tea Tavern Magic that Makes All the Difference

Water: The Secret Tea Ingredient

One of the most important components of tea is the water in which its brewed, an ancient "secret" going back to 730 A.D.

That's when *Classic of Tea (Cha Jing)*, a 10-chapter tome on tea, was written by brew master Lu Yu, also known informally as China's tea sage. In the book, Yu spends an entire chapter on explaining how and why the water in which tea is brewed can make all the difference in the world. Surprisingly, he rated groundwater as the worst for tea, but then again he didn't have the advanced filtration and bottling technology we use today.

More recently, our friends at [Tea Curious](#) have amassed a small library of blog posts in which they test different water, from bottled to tap, to see whether and how water impacts tea brewed at the same volume, in the same temperature, and steeped for the exact same amount of time.

Spoiler: The type of water used makes a huge, absolutely noticeable, drastic difference. Many of the [Tea Curious tests](#) show just how stark that difference can be simply upon visual inspection, let alone taste.

Why Does Water Make Such a Huge Difference?

Generally speaking, what's *in* water matters quite a bit. Most people assume that means filtered, distilled, or reverse-osmosis water is best for tea, but that's not actually true. In fact, those options will produce an odd not-quite-"bitter" flavor because -- put *very* simply -- there simply isn't anything for the tea flavor to cling *to* and infuse with. However, over-mineralized teas can have *too much* "stuff" in it and thus block full flavor extraction as well.

So What Water to Use?

There isn't necessarily a one-water-fits-all answer. As any water wizard will tell you, water has many mysterious properties and can take many different forms. Even tap water within the same municipal district can be wildly different due to the age of the pipes it traveled through or the exact variances of the water treatment plant it went through.

Adding to potential confusion, not all bottled water is the same, either. Aquafina isn't Zero Water

when it comes to solid particulates, and Evian has a different filtration goal and level than Aquafina.

Which can all be rather overwhelming. And troubling -- tea, after all, is gotten in exchange for treasure or coins, so one never wants to waste it.

The Tea Tavern's Water Spells from Tea Curious

The good news is you can [create your own perfect water for brewing tea](#), and without being a water wizard or needing to cast a [water spell](#). Though the process can feel like magic.

Basically, you do this by starting from as close to scratch as possible.

Begin with distilled water.

Then, re-add the right minerals, in the right amount, to ensure an optimal tea experience.

With our [remineralizers](#), this process is as easy as adding a few drops from a bottle to your tea.

However, there are some key considerations to keep in mind: different formulations of water will highlight different aspects of tea. For example, our [Original remineralizer](#) package highlights the bright and vibrant flavors of tea by adding hardness and alkalinity while keeping calcium low. The [Springtide formulations](#), however, are meant to mimic the soft water found in Japan. While it can be used for all teas, it is best suited for whites, oolongs and green teas. For warmer, more umami flavors, and especially to bring out the darker notes often found in black teas, pu'er and heicha, and darker oolongs, you'll want to try the [Autumn remineralizers](#).

Still feeling a bit of trepidation?

No worries. As always, we at the Tea Tavern are prepared to help make your tea journey as smooth as possible. Take this: Our [Basic Brewer's Components](#) bundle.



And for our more well-traveled Adventurers, already familiar with water's mystical properties, there's the [Master Brewer's Components](#) kit.



Still need a map on your Water Quest?

If you're in the Phoenix metro valley, you can always join us for a [Travelling Tea Tavern](#) ceremony at HeatSync Labs where a welcoming group of like-minded folks -- including our brew master -- will happily answer questions. Or you can send any questions to quests@tea-tavern.com.