



The 'Tea-rrific' way teas are made

There are normally two kinds of special breeds in the world, **the tea lovers** and the **coffee addicts**. The tea folks tend to see themselves as a more **sophisticated 'nobili-tea'** (pun intended) that are sometimes misunderstood for their unflinching loyalty to their tea. Unlike a coffee drinker who needs that cup of Joe each morning to function like normal human being, a tea lover usually **chooses when and where** to slowly sip on their liquid enjoyment.

Thanks to the folks at **Twining's**, we are going to quickly summarized how teas are made, from plant to pot. Join us, the Food Experts at Ricebowl Asia in exploring the wonderful journey of your cup of tea!



At the factory

The real tea production begins right after the tea leaves have been plucked where the leaves are first brought to the tea factory to be lovingly processed. These factories are usually located in close vicinity to the tea garden, to ease transportation as well as to keep the tea leaves as fresh as possible.

Within 24 hours from when they are plucked, the tea leaves will be processed, packed up and ready to be shipped out. But what transpires during these 24 hours is vital, as this is when the fate of the leaves will be determined. Will they be green, black or in-between? Caffeinated or decaff? This is the most important time in a tea leaf's life.

The next stage of production is the sorting process, where all the tea are graded and sorted according to their characteristics – black, green, white and Oolong. Due to the fact that different sized tea leaves brew at varying speeds, the leaves are normally separated into batches of the same size.



Next up, the tea leaves are then classified by type, size and appearance. Different countries normally have their own ways and systems for classifying tea. Like in China, their teas are named by the region they originate from, type of leaf, the way they were made or even by the myths behind the tea.

Once the classification process is done, the teas are then ready to be packed into foil-lined paper sacks or tea chests/boxes. These keep the leaves in perfect condition by ensuring they are dry, also protecting them from all the potential hazards of transportation to various countries.

The tea process

Here's a fun little titbit; black, green and white teas all start off similarly. They are then 'transformed' during the tea production process. Black tea is the most commonly consumed tea and there are two ways of producing it. One way is the 'orthodox' method and the other is the 'CTC' method.



The 'orthodox' method

The orthodox method is the most commonly applied process throughout the fabulous tea-making world. During this process, the tea leaves will go through four stages which are **withering**, **rolling**, **oxidation** and **drying**.

Withering

Tea leaves are normally full of moisture when they arrive at the factory. The first stage of '**withering**' **reduces** **their water content** to about 60% - 70%. This is achieved by laying out the tea leaves in big troughs on a special wire mesh. Air is then passed through them, gently drying them out **without causing damages** to the leaves. This normally takes between 12 – 17 hours, which makes the leaves bendy and ready to be rolled.

Oxidation

This is the process that **determines a tea's colour, taste and strength**. The leaves are first placed in troughs or laid out on wide tables. They are then left there for around 30 minutes to two hours at a temperature of about 26°C.

During this time, the **enzymes** within the tea leaves will react to the air surrounding them, **changing the leaves' colour** from green to beige and then to a rich deep brown colour. The colour of the leaves **indicates how oxidised** the tea is and how it is going to taste like, **determining their flavour**.

To produce a tea with a lighter taste, the oxidation process is halted when the leaves are slightly brown. For a stronger tasting tea, the leaves will remain until they appear rich and coppery.

Rolling

In the colourful past of tea making history, tea leaves were **painstakingly rolled by hand**. Today, most modern factories use a **special rolling machine** that rotates horizontally on a rolling table. This special movement twists and turns the leaves until they are thin and wiry looking. This also **breaks them apart**, which readies them for the next stage: oxidation.



Drying

Once the leaves have been oxidised to their proper levels, they are then passed through hot air dryers that further reduces their water content to about 3%. The leaves are now ready to be sorted and packed.



The Cut, Tear & Curl (CTC) Method

This method was invented during the Second World War in order to increase the weight of the tea that could potentially be packed into a chest or sack. Like the orthodox method, the leaves are first withered. Then, they go through a series of rollers covered in hundreds of small, sharp grinds. These grinds are able to cut, tear and curl the leaves, which produce tiny granules that are perfect for tea bags. Finally, they go through the same oxidation and drying process as the orthodox method.



Green & White Teas



Black, green, oolong teas, they all start off with **same leaves**. They are normally classified during the production process. For instance, **green teas completely forgo the oxidation process**. It's this lack of oxidation that gives green tea leaves a **very light, delicate colour and fresh flavour**. They are usually pan-dried or steamed to kill off any active enzymes that could react to air.

Once done, the leaves are rolled into all kinds of shapes. Gunpowder tea leaves are shaped like little (but cute) bullets, while some others might be tightly wound spirals or long curved arches.

Oolong tea leaves on the other hand are made from **half or partially oxidised leaves**. Once the leaves have been wilted, they are either wrapped in cloth and rolled around to bruise the edges of the leaves or shaken in baskets so **only the tiny bits of leaves react with air**.

The rolling and shaking will continue until the tea leaves are 30% brown and 70% green, ensuring there's just the right amount of oxidation, **leaving the Oolong tea with a fresh colour and delicate fruity aroma**.

For white tea that is **slightly sweet and champagne coloured**, only unopened buds and young leaves of the tea plant are used. Other than that, the process remains **quite similar to that of green tea**.

So there you have it you royal-teas. The next time you're having tea with a friend, try asking them if they know how tea is made and if they don't, go ahead and impress them. You're now a cer-tea-fied quali-tea tea drinker!



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For all you tea-sippers out there, you can find Twinings Tea and many more imported treats at your friendly online grocer, BIGbox Asia. TheBigBox.Asia currently covers categories such as confectionaries, juices, dairies & grocery products and is ever expanding our line of offerings to meet the demand of their hungry-go-lucky consumers. Shop with confidence at BIGbox Asia as it is the only online grocer that includes unbiased and fascinating facts and product benefits of items sold, provided by the Food Experts of Asia, Ricebowl Asia.

