



The Art of TEA TASTING

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Tools and materials needed:

- A few selections of tea that you want to study and compare
- Taster's Mugs, 150 ml capacity, coupled with tea bowls for holding the infused liquor Tasting Spoons
- Bowl for warming the spoons
- Bowl for used spoons
- Tea Holders
- Water Kettle, preferably electric ones with 2000W heating capability or above.
- Kitchen thermometer
- Electronic Scale, 0 - 20 grams
- Electronic Timer

Preparation

- Use a kettle that boils a lot of water quickly, i.e. one that has a higher output power and larger capacity. Good ergonomic should be a consideration as well.
- Measure 3 grams of each tea and put inside the leaf-holders in a line ready for use (note the sequence so you know which tea is which)
- Preheat mugs in a steamer, oven, or by filling with boiling water for a couple of minutes
- Line the mugs in a straight line, with enough hand space in between, say 4 inches (10 cm)
- Put the measured tea in the mug, in the same sequence as the line up
- Set the timer to the required infusion time
- Fill the mug, to the rim, consecutively with water at the temperature designated for the specific tea, timing the intervals between the filling of each mug
- Cover the lid immediately after filling of each mug
- Let steep for the required time, 5 or 6 minutes, but have to be the same for each mug
- While steeping, put a tea bowl in front of each mug
- Warm the tasting spoons in a separate bowl of hot water
- When the first mug is infused to the needed time, decant by holding tight the lid and letting the liquor drain through the slits into the bowl. Time the decanting for the next mug to the exact time lapse during step 05, such that each mug is infused for the same amount of time. Go through the line to decant all the mugs

Process of Tasting tea

- Make sure your palate is clean.
- Starting from the tea which you think will be the lightest taste (not necessarily the lightest colour), sniff the tea bowl. (or sniff the inside of the mug lid, if you have not chosen to perform step 12)
- Scoop a spoonful to slurp in (with air, please don't mind the manner) and let it roll in your tongue. Let the liquid rest a second and roll it again before swallowing.
- Feel your palate, tongue, throat and stomach for their reactions with the drink.
- Halt for 5 to 10 seconds before you go for the next mug, after taking a small bite of bread to clean your palate and clear the lingers of the previous tea. Remember to clear the palate every time when you go back to cross compare different selections
- When the infused leaves are a bit cooler, sniff them. Compare the appearance and smells. Keep notes for each selection for later reference.

Ask yourself while tasting

- How does the liquor smell?
- How does the inside of the mug lid smell?
- Does the aroma linger? Which part of it lingers longer? Which shorter?
- Does any part of the aroma remind you of another substance?
- How does the liquor taste?
- Does any part of the taste come first and some other later?
- What do the different parts of the taste remind you of?
- Which part of your tongue gives you the sensation of the taste?
- How does the taste stay?
- Does the taste change during the process of tasting?
- What is the texture of the tea liquor?
- Do you feel any taste at the throat? Or elsewhere?
- How do the infused leaves smell? Same as the liquor? Or different?
- What are the characteristic differences between different selections?
- How does your stomach feel a few seconds after drinking? A few minutes?
- Do you feel any other thing?





TERMS USED DURING TEA TASTING

BLACK:	A black appearance is desirable, preferably with 'BLOOM'. This term is used with Orthodox (Large Leaf) manufacture.
BLACKISH:	This is a satisfactory appearance for a small leaf black tea and denotes careful sorting at the factory.
BLOOM:	A sign of good manufacture and sorting (where the reduction of leaf has mainly taken place before firing). A 'sheen' which has not been removed by over handling or over sorting.
BOLD:	Particles of leaf which are too large for the particular grade being observed.
BROWN:	A brown appearance with CTC manufacture, which normally reflects too hard handling of the leaf.
CHESTY:	Inferior or damp packing materials cause this taint.
CHOPPY:	Orthodox leaf which has to be cut with a breaker during sorting.
CHUNKY:	A very large broken from Orthodox manufacture.
CLEAN:	Leaf which is free from fibre, dust or any extraneous matter.
CREPY:	A crimped appearance common with the larger grade broken from orthodox manufacture, such as Broken Orange Pekoe
CURLY:	The leaf appearance of whole leaf grade orthodox teas such as Orange Pekoe – as opposed to 'WIRY'.
EVEN:	True to the grade and consisting of pieces of leaf quite even in size.
FLAKEY:	Flat, open and often light in texture.
GREY:	Caused by too much abrasion in sorting.
GRAINY:	Describes well made CTC primary grades, particularly Pekoe Dust and Dust 1 Grades
LEAFY:	Orthodox manufacture leaf tending to be on the large or long side.
LIGHT:	A tea light in weight and of poor density. Sometimes 'FLAKEY'.
MAKE:	Well made (or not) and must be true to the grade.
MUSHY:	A tea which has been packed or stored with a high moisture content.
MUSTY:	A tea affected by mildew.
NEAT:	A grade having good 'MAKE' and size
NOSE:	Smell of the dry leaf.
POWDERY:	Fine light dust. No use in leaf tea or tea bags!
RAGGED:	An uneven badly manufactured and graded tea.
STALK & FIBRE:	Should be minimal in primary or top grades, but generally unavoidable in the lower grades of an assorted batch.
TIP:	A sign of fine plucking and apparent in the top grades of Orthodox manufacture.
UNEVEN & MIXED:	Uneven pieces of leaf usually indicative of poor sorting and not true to the particular grade.
WELL TWISTED:	Applicable to Orthodox manufacture. Often referred to as 'well made' or 'rolled' and used for describing whole leaf grades.
WIRY:	Leaf appearance of a well – twisted, thin leaf Orthodox tea. Terminology that describes infused tea leaves.
AROMA:	Smell or scent denoting 'inherent character', usually at high elevations.
BISCUITY:	A pleasant aroma often found in well – fired Assams.
BRIGHT:	A lively bright appearance. Usually indicates bright liquors.
COPPERY:	A bright leaf which usually indicates a well manufactured tea.
DULL:	Lacks brightness and usually denotes a poor tea. Can be due to faulty manufacture and firing, or a high moisture content.
DARK:	A dark or dull colour which usually indicates poorer leaf.
GREEN:	Caused by under – fermentation, or characteristic of leaf from immature bushes (liquors are often RAW or LIGHT). Can also be caused by poor rolling with Orthodox teas.
MIXED or UNEVEN:	Leaf of varying colours.
TARRY:	A smoky aroma

TERMINOLOGY DESCRIBING THE FLAVOUR OF LIQUORED (BREWED) TEA



BAGGY:	A taint normally resulting from unlined hessian bags. (Rarer today now tea is shipped in foil lined paper sacks).
BODY:	A liquor having both fullness and strength, as opposed to being 'THIN'.
BAKEY:	An over – fired liquor. Tea in which too much moisture has been driven off. Can also be described as 'TOASTY'.
BRIGHT:	Denotes a lively fresh tea with good keeping quality.
BRISK:	The most 'live' characteristic. Results from good manufacture.
BURNT:	Extreme over firing. It is unlikely that such over – fired tea would make it as far as the quality end of the market that most readers will inhabit, but often these teas are sold to be used in accountant – designed blends such as very cheap supermarket own – label brands.
CHARACTER:	An attractive taste when describing better high elevation growth, and peculiar to origin
COLOURY:	Indicates useful depth of colour and strength.
COARSE:	Fibre content. Again, coarse teas are usually cheap and nasty. They are also a nightmare to pack due to exceptional bulk density variation. I have also heard these teas described as 'HAIRY DOGS'.
COMMON:	A very plain, light and thin liquor with no distinct flavour.
CREAM:	A precipitate obtained after cooling. Selling brokers often 'cream' Assam teas, which means they allow them to stew until cold (20 minutes infusion!). If the result looks like cream of tomato soup, this means that the tea will stand well in a warehouse. It will also destroy your palate for an hour or two. Creamed teas are assessed by eye, not taste buds!
DRY:	Indicates slight over – firing.
DULL:	Not clear, and lacking any brightness or briskness.
EARTHY:	Normally caused by damp storage. A taste which can at times be climatically inherent in leaf from certain origins.
FLAT:	Unfresh, usually due to age.
FLAVOUR:	A most desirable extension of 'CHARACTER', caused by slow growth at high elevations and comparatively rare.
FULL:	A good combination of strength and colour
FRUITY:	Can be due to over – fermentation and/or bacterial infection before firing. An over-ripe taste.
GONE OFF:	Self explanatory. A flat or old tea. Also used to indicate a high moisture content.
GREEN:	An immature, 'raw' character. Often due to under-fermentation and sometimes under withering.
HARD:	A very pungent liquor.
HARSH:	A taste generally related to under – withered leaf, and very rough.
HEAVY:	A thick, strong and coloury liquor with limited briskness.
HIGH-FIRED:	Over fired but not 'BAKEY', 'TOASTY' or 'BURNT'.
LIGHT:	Lacking strength and any depth of colour.
MATURE:	But not bitter or 'FLAT'. A positive term that is occasionally applied to Darjeelings, which can actually improve with age.
METALLIC:	A sharp coppery flavour. Can also be described as 'BRASS SPOON'.



MUDDY:	A dull, opaque liquor.
POINT:	A bright, acidy and penetrating characteristic.
PLAIN:	A liquor which is 'clean' but lacking in other desirable characteristics.
PUNGENT:	Astringent with a good combination of briskness, brightness and strength. Often used to describe good quality North Indian (Assam) teas.
QUALITY:	Refers to cup quality and denotes a combination of the most desirable liquoring qualities.
RASPING:	A very 'COARSE' and 'HARSH' liquor.
RAW:	A bitter and unpleasant liquor.
SMOKEY:	Often caused by leaks around the dryer heating tubes. When describing Lapsang Souchong tea, however, smokiness is an absolute necessity!
SOFT:	The opposite of 'BRISK' and lacking any live characteristic. Caused by inefficient fermentation and/or firing.
STRENGTH:	Substance in the cup
STEWED:	A 'SOFT' liquor with an undesirable taste caused by faulty firing at low temperatures and often insufficient air flow. Lacking in 'POINT'
TAINTS:	Characteristics or tastes which are alien to the tea being tasted, such as diesel or garlic. Usually due to tea being stored near foreign commodities with strong characteristics of their own.
THIN:	An insipid, light liquor which lacks any desirable characteristics.
WEEDY:	A grass or hay taste related to under withering. Can also be referred to as 'WOODY'.



