

Oolong Tea the Chinese Way

Follow the steps below to prepare Oolong tea the 'Chinese' way, using the popular Gong Fu method:

1. Find a comfortable tea drinking location inside or outdoors. Place the teapot, and other tools on a small table.

Tea tools may include the following:

- Teapot
- 6 teacups
- 6 tea snifter cups
- 1 ewer
- 1 tea filter (sits inside the ewer)
- 1 teaplate (runoff-water collection vessel)
- 1 bowl (vessel for spent tea leaves)
- 1 teapot brush
- 1 tea leaf pick
- 1 towel

2. Boil water. Water significantly influences the taste of tea, so make sure to use the purest water possible.
3. Select your tea. With experience, you'll know the right one.

Teas can be separated into two categories, baked and raw. Baked tea leaves (Shou Cha) have a dark color, are rich in flavor, and when infused, produce varied red colors. These teas have been oxidized/fermented excessively—and sometimes baked with fruit or inflorescence, such as apricot or jasmine—to produce strong, unique flavors. Generally speaking, baked teas are more durable, which means they can be infused several times without losing flavor and turning bitter.

Raw teas (Sheng Cha) are green, have a light aroma, and produce green yellow colors when infused. These teas have been lightly oxidized/fermented (Oolong tea) and produce light aroma and flavor. Raw teas, especially the rawest tea—green tea—are more sensitive, which means they can be infused 4~5 times before losing their essence and turning bitter.

Water temperature is crucial to properly brewing loose-leaf teas.

- Baked teas require boiled water, cooled to 85°~ 90°
- Raw teas require 100° boiled water.

You will be using boiled water frequently. Keep your water pot boiling close by on a small gas burner or electric hotplate if possible. More time chatting, relaxing, drinking tea—and less time running around—is the goal. Camping stoves are a convenient choice for boiling water when enjoying Chinese tea outdoors.

4. Open your package of tea. Place your teapot in a large bowl, a deep-dish pan or on a handmade teaplate and open it. Arrange an appropriate number of teacups around the teapot on the teaplate or in the bowl. The large bowl serves as a vessel for excess water. Prepare another bowl, container, or other dish for spent tea leaves.

Chinese tea aficionados may choose to put the teapot on decorative, runoff-water plates. Gong Fu-style teaplate vessels are usually a foot-or-so in diameter and consist of two tiers. The top tier plate is decoratively perforated, and sits in the lower tier, which functions as a runoff-water collection vessel. Teaplates may be made of wood, bamboo, metal, hand-spun clay, ceramic, or other materials. There is no limit to the range or style of teaplates, and prices vary greatly.

5. At tea time, measure tea leaves by pouring them from the bag into the palm of your hand. A heaping handful is too much. Just enough to fill 'the cup' of your palm is about right. Naturally, more tea leaves will produce strong bodied tea, while less leaves vice-versa. With experience, and a taste for tea, you'll know how much is required.
6. Pour your handful of tea leaves into the teapot.
7. Pour hot/boiling water into the teapot. Fill it up and allow the water to overflow. Bubbles will immediately begin to froth at the top of the pot as the infused leaves begin to activate. Scrape the teapot lid across the top of the teapot opening once or twice to remove bubbles and drop it into the teapot opening.
8. Pour more hot/boiling water over the top of the teapot to stabilize the temperature inside and outside the teapot. This is a good habit and tradition among Chinese tea drinkers. In wintertime, preheating teaware by first pouring hot/boiling water over it is especially important to prevent cracking or other structural damage.
9. Preheat and wash teacups by immediately pouring the first infusion over them. It is recommended, and sometimes very important, to pour out the first infusion to remove any grit, grime, or other processing impurities attached to the tealeaves.
10. Place a ewer close by and put a tea strainer into the ewer. Using tea strainers is optional, but are convenient tools for removing small tea leaf particles when pouring infusions into the ewer.
11. Return the teapot to the teaplate and refill it with hot/boiling water.
12. Allow the hot/boiling water to infuse for thirty seconds to 1 minute. The first drinkable infusion should be the best, so monitor the infusion time carefully. If your tea infusion tastes bitter, then you know you've infused for too long. Thirty to forty seconds is just about right.
13. Pour infusions into the ewer by inverting the teapot and sitting it into the strainer in the ewer (non-strainer users may place the teapot directly into the ewer).
14. Return the teapot to the teaplate or bowl and repeat steps 7 & 8.
15. Infuse tea leaves with hot/boiling water again-and-again while pouring cups of tea for everyone. Timing infusion and serving is only improved through experience.
16. Review step 3 to help determine the number infusions. Rule of thumb: if tea turns bitter then it needs to be disposed of and replaced. Most teas provide 4~5 infusions.
17. Serve tea by itself or with small, light-flavored snacks, such as crackers, dried or fresh fruit, nuts, berries, seeds, or others.
18. Maintain a steady rhythm of fun and flow of tea until it is time to re-seal your package of tea.