

Tea Blending

True Tea vs. Herbal Tea

Tea blends that come from **true tea**—from the *Camellia Sinensis* plant—are caffeinated. This includes green tea, black tea, white tea, and oolong tea, along with all of their varieties. Although they come from the same plant, each type of tea is exposed to differing levels of **oxidization**.

This process occurs when the harvested tea leaves are rolled by hand or machine, creating tiny cracks that allow oxygen to enter and react with plant enzymes. Green and white teas are not oxidized, and are instead dried intact in the sun or by pan frying.

White tea is the least processed of all varieties and is made from baby tea leaves, giving it a delicate and complex flavor. **Green tea** is the second least processed tea, left to wither until the leaves are loose and then immediately getting dried. **Oolong tea** goes through partial oxidization, scratching only the surface of the tea leaves. **Black tea** goes through full oxidization, giving it the strongest and most robust flavor.

Herbal tea blends start with a base such as rooibos, chamomile, lavender, etc. that are naturally caffeine-free. There are some non-tea plants that do contain caffeine and can make a caffeinated herbal blend, including several plants in the holly family (genus *Ilex*)!

What makes a tea blend?

Tea blends require at least two ingredients but can contain as many as one wants, based on the percentage of each component. Herbs, spices, fruits, roots, flowers, and some flavorings can be added to a tea blend.

Two ingredient example: **Earl grey tea**, made with black tea and bergamot oil.

What makes a good tea blend?

Everyone has different tastes and preferences, but the general goal for a good tea blend is to not mask the tea flavor with the additional ingredients. All flavor notes in the blend need to be balanced out, and how the tea is served should be considered when picking ingredients.

For example, if you plan to use cream or milk with your tea, you'll want to avoid ingredients with acidity. Citrus, hibiscus, etc. can cause the milk to curdle and ruin your tea.

Making your tea blend, step by step

1. Decide on a simple blend vs. complex blend

Simple tea blends typically consist on 1-3 ingredients, and can sometimes be a blend of true teas. **English Breakfast** is made from three different black tea varieties: Assam tea, Kenyan tea, and Ceylon tea. Complex blends can consist of 3 or more ingredients and involve more added flavors.

Tea blending beginners might find it easier to start with a simple blend and grow to complex blends once they expand their flavor profile.

If you normally drink pure tea or pure tea blends, a simple blend is a good place to start.

If you normally drink flavored, fruity, or floral blends, try a complex blend first.

2. Measure the components and make 2 or more blend variations at a time.

When beginning a tea blend, the total weight should be around 2-2.5 grams or 1 teaspoon. That's enough to prepare an 8 oz. cup of tea.

Measure the tea blends accordingly:

1 teaspoon = 2 grams

1/2 teaspoons = 1 gram

1/4 teaspoons = 0.5 grams

Ideally, you'll want the tea base to be the dominant flavor and ingredient in a blend. Beyond that you're completely free to experiment and throw together whatever ingredients you think might go well together. Toss the components together to blend, then add to the teabag and steep.

3. Document Everything

Use your notebooks to document ingredients, measurements, flavor combinations, and experiments. You may not get a perfect blend on the first try, so make notes as your recipe changes. If you write everything down, you'll have an easier time remembering all the different ingredients, measurements and combinations you tried.

Remember to record your tasting notes too. You'll want to make a blend that tastes great to you, so keep making variations until you get there.