

Visit Britain's First and Only Tea Gardens at Tregothnan Estate

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Learn about England's only plantation that produce tea leaves, and get some helpful tips from an expert on how to steep a cup of tea.

September 26, 2019 - by [Fiona Tapp](#)



Bella Percy-Hughes picking tea leaves at the Tregothnan Estate, photograph by swns.com

For most Brits, any problem can be solved with a nice cup of tea. But, the majority of the country's tea leaves make a long journey from China or India before they reach those English teacups.

That's why the tea grown on the [Tregothnan Estate](#) is such a rare British treasure. Set on the banks of the River Fal, near Truro, Cornwall, the estate established the nation's first tea gardens in 1999 and began producing and selling the world's only British-grown tea in 2005.

While that first crop produced just 28 grams of tea, today the estate yields about 10 tonnes annually and blends some 14 varieties, including English Breakfast, Earl Grey, Jasmine Green and Rose tea made with real rose petals.

For the past 12 years, John Price, a former professional nurseryman, has volunteered to care for the estate's young tea plants. The 84 year old has travelled the world studying botany and tea. Through Sri Lanka, Japan, China and India, he has learned all there is to know about tea and lectures about the two national collections he has created at Tregothnan through experimentation. For all his studying, Price has come to realize that Britain's favourite brew is actually rather simple. "Two leaves and a bud, no more," he says. "This is what tea is all about."



John Price, illustration by Cristian Fowlie.

How can tea grow in England?

Many days in Cornwall are actually warmer than in Darjeeling, India. We have a lot of rain and great rolling countryside, which helps with irrigation. The bushes we grow at Tregothnan are our own unique variety, but are similar to Darjeeling.

What goes into the process?

We process all our leaves by hand, so it's very time consuming and labour intensive—you pick it, and you let it wilt. The leaves have to be withered first so they are malleable, then rolled to bruise the leaves and release the oils. They are left to oxidize, and, as they dry, start to turn from green to brown to black. The whole process takes about 36 hours and it takes about 700 leaves to produce one kilogram of tea.

Why are more people not growing tea in England?

We have very little competition because tea is a difficult crop to grow and maintain, especially the young plants. You need a lot of land, a lot of manpower and the perfect climate conditions. That's why, across the world, tea is grown at large estates.

You seem very proud of what you are growing.

This plantation is growing extremely well. We've collected all sorts and take cuttings from these bushes to grow little tea [plants]. Now we know what we want to grow: a light green tea achieved from Assam; Chinese [plants] that have quite small leaves; a little, low bush that is grown in the mountains of Vietnam; an Indian tea. Another interest of mine are great big Camellia—the darker green, taller bushes. I've established a national collection of *Camellia reticulata*. [Growing tea at Tregothnan] is an exciting innovation to have been involved in.

John Price's Guide to Brewing the Perfect Cup



1. Start by warming your teapot with boiling water.
2. Steep your tea bags or loose leaf in the teapot with freshly boiled water, that has been left to cool, using one bag or spoon of tea per person plus one for the pot.
3. Steeping times vary by variety. As a general rule, steep Dark Oolong and White teas for three to five minutes and Light Oolong and green teas for two minutes
4. Whether you drink it black or add milk before or after the tea is poured is a contentious issue, so do whatever tastes best to you.

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