

Few things in life are more beautiful than a simple bouquet of flowers in full bloom. You might be accustomed to seeing flowers on your table or in your garden, but what about in your teacup? Blooming tea, or flowering tea, is a beautiful beverage that tastes as wonderful as it looks.

## **What Is Blooming Tea?**

Blooming tea, also called flowering tea, is a type of tea that actually “blooms” in your cup or teapot. Typically, blooming tea is made by bundling traditional types of dried tea leaves with a dried flower in the center. When you place the bundle in hot water, the tea and flowers bloom, creating a visual and sensory work of art.

Blooming tea or flowering tea are the most common names for these tea bundles, but you might also hear them referred to as blossoming tea, tea roses, artistic tea, display tea, hand-tied tea, or hand-sewn tea.

Since a blooming tea “ball” is simply tea leaves bundled around a flower, there are practically endless combinations of flowering tea to enjoy. In this article, we’re going to discuss the origins of blooming tea, along with the best types of teas and flowers for blooming bundles, and all the other must-know facts and details about one of the most popular trends in today’s tea culture.

## **Origins of Blooming Tea**

While being a true work of art, Blooming tea is also a bit mysterious in its origin and history. Recently, we’ve seen a growing trend toward these beautiful tea blooms, but when did the practice of “artistic tea” really begin?

One thing we’re sure of is that the roots of blooming tea are firmly set in China. Some tea historians believe there is evidence to support the theory that the art of blooming tea first began in the 10<sup>th</sup> century in the royal courts of China. Other theories point to blooming tea being a more recent invention, with its birth being in modern times.

The second theory is that blooming tea was an artistic creation that came to life during the 1990s. This was about the time in history when tea sales were down in China, and tea masters and tea purveyors were looking for ways to increase sales with a new, exciting tea product. Considering that tea on its own is a pretty simple concept, coming up with a creative new tea product proved to be a challenge.

In this theory, this is where blooming tea enters the picture. Rather than being a simple tea with the added fragrance of different flowers, blooming tea combined the flavors and scents of both traditional and floral teas with a beautiful presentation that was especially appealing to women at the time.

It could also be that both of these theories are correct, with the invention of blooming tea actually occurring at some point in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, but with a modern resurgence that happened in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Either way, the blooming tea industry is a rapidly growing sector of tea culture, not only boosting the tea industry as a whole but also drawing in more interest from many who may not have previously been interested in tea culture.

## **How Is Blooming Tea Made?**

Blooming tea truly is a work of art created by skilled tea masters who take time with each tea bundle. When enjoying a cup or pot of flowering tea, it's important to realize the experience is very different from popping a tea bag into a cup of hot water. Each tea bundle takes time and mastery to create and deserves to be appreciated for both its beauty and the mastery behind it.

To make a blooming tea bundle, tea leaves or buds are carefully chosen for how they'll bloom within the bundle. The tea is then carefully sewn by hand into the desired shape of the bundle, with a floral inside. White teas, with their long, soft tea leaves and buds, are often the most desired for their presentation upon bloom. Sometimes, a flavoring component is added to tea at this time.

Tea bundles may contain a single flower or multiple flowers, depending on the desired aesthetic of the bloom. There are some blooming teas that don't contain any floral component at all but are simply tea leaves that have been artistically pressed and sewn together to create a beautiful tea bloom when added to hot water.

Sphere-shaped flowering tea bundles are the most common, but other shapes are used as well, including ovals, heart shapes, cones, rosettes, flat discs, peach shapes, and sometimes even bundles that resemble a mushroom. The form of the tea bundle affects the appearance of the flowering tea bloom.

Tea masters must also consider the size of the bloom. Some flowering tea bundles are created for cups or mugs, while others are larger and more suitable for presentation in a teapot. Tea bundles typically bloom slowly, and watching the bloom unfold, and blossom is a relaxing and almost enchanting experience.

There are also bundles that are designed to open more quickly for a dramatic presentation. These types of bundles are best if you're sharing the tea with guests or are planning on sharing your blooming tea experience through video on social media.

## **Flavor & Appearance of Blooming Tea**

It's easy to categorize most types of teas into specific flavor profiles, even with subtle differences among tea growing regions, growing conditions, and the craftwork of tea masters. Flowering tea is something different altogether, offering a beautiful range of flavors, aromas, and presentations.

This is all because the types of tea and florals used in blooming tea bundles are entirely up to the tea master creating each hand-tied bundle. Any kind of tea can be used and combined with any type of edible floral. The flavor and appearance of blooming tea rely entirely on these factors, which offer practically endless combinations.

All of that said, the combination of tea and florals used in blooming tea tends to create a light, delicately flavored tea with subtle floral and sweet fruit nuances. White tea is the most common type of tea leaves used in blooming tea, followed closely by green tea.

The reason that these two types of teas are the most popular for flowering tea bundles is that they produce tea that is lighter in color, allowing the visual of the flowering bloom to dominate the presentation. An oolong or black tea would have to be brewed at a weaker concentration to allow the full beauty of the bloom to shine through.

White and green teas are also more delicate in flavor and scent, so they enhance the contributions of the florals rather than overpowering them. The floral component lends very, very subtle flavor and scent, and sometimes it's barely detectable. Using a tea with a strong flavor profile would completely take away from those delicate notes.

The appearance of blooming tea depends on the type of tea, the flower used, and also the shape of the tea bundle, and how it was sewn together. Smaller, single flower blooms are often used for bundles created for cups or mugs. Bundles that are designed for glass teapots are sometimes more intricate, with multiple blooms opening and creating a design, including floral "vines" that reach up or expand outwards in the teapot.

### **Are Blooming Teas Safe To Drink?**

The answer to this question is, yes, absolutely! Blooming tea is pretty to look at, but it's also a treat to drink. The flowers that are used in blooming tea bundles are all classified as food-safe or edible florals. While the flowers don't typically add a potent punch of flavor, they are completely safe, and some even bring a few health benefits to tea as well.

### **Best Types of Flowers to Use for Blooming Tea**

Any type of edible flower can be used in a blooming tea bundle. Since the flowers don't contribute a strong flavor or scent to the tea, the choice of floral is almost always dependent on the desired aesthetic of the tea once it blooms. Some tea bundles contain a single, prominent floral, such as a large chrysanthemum, while others feature multiple smaller flowers, like small rosebuds, marigolds, and jasmine flowers.

Some of the most commonly used flowers for blooming tea include:

- **Jasmine:** Jasmine is a popular flower for scenting green and white teas. It's also a very attractive, although somewhat delicate flower, so it works perfectly for tea blooms. Of all the flowers used in blooming tea, jasmine is one that lends more noticeable floral notes and fragrance. Jasmine is seen as one of the more romantic flowers and is strongly associated with love.
- **Rose:** Rose is one of the most popular blooms used for flowering tea. Not only are roses gorgeous once the bundles bloom, but they also offer some nice health benefits to the tea. Rose blooming tea bundles are great during cold or flu season or anytime that you're looking for a little boost of vitamin C.
- **Carnation:** This popular blooming tea floral adds a beautiful aesthetic to the tea with its larger, full blooms. Carnation offers a very subtle flavor and scent, making this a good choice for people who want to experience blooming tea but aren't overly crazy about strong floral notes in their tea. Carnation is also respected for its detoxifying properties.
- **Chrysanthemum:** Chrysanthemum is another common flower used in blooming teas. Single flowers may be sewn into the bundle for a more petit bloom, or multiples may be used for a more dramatic effect. Chrysanthemum imparts delicate floral notes, which compliment nicely with both green and white tea. Chrysanthemum is also thought of as a "neutral" floral, being neither too stimulating nor too relaxing.
- **Lavender:** This flower is known for its relaxing attributes and nicely compliments blooming tea that's enjoyed for relaxation and stress-relieving purposes. While lavender makes for a beautiful bloom, the flowers are a bit taller than others used in blooming teas, so you're more likely to find these in bundles created for teapots.
- **Hibiscus:** Hibiscus flower is commonly used in combination with traditional dried-leaf teas, and some enjoy steeping just the dried flower on its own. Anyone who has enjoyed hibiscus tea knows that it produces a beverage with reddish-pink hues. Some blooming teas use a bit of hibiscus for both the fruity floral flavors it offers and also to add a unique visual to the tea. Hibiscus isn't the most common flower used in blooming tea bundles, but you can find some made with it. Hibiscus also offers anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant properties.
- **Chamomile:** Chamomile is another flower that's widely recognized in tea culture. Chamomile is one of the gentlest, nurturing florals and is known for its relaxing and stress-relieving attributes. Chamomile is also safe for even the youngest tea drinkers, so this makes for a lovely blooming tea when enjoying a tea party with children. Chamomile also looks lovely in tea blooms, lending a beautiful "wildflower" look to the final bloom.

## Caffeine Content of Blooming Tea

The caffeine content in blooming tea is on the lower end of the spectrum. While not completely caffeine-free, blooming tea doesn't have the same level of caffeine as oolong or black tea, and certainly not as much as other popular caffeinated beverages like coffee.

The flowers used in blooming tea contribute zero caffeine to the tea, so the amount of caffeine depends entirely on the type of tea used. Both white tea and green tea, which are the most common types of teas used in blooming bundles, have lower amounts of caffeine than their darker tea counterparts.

White tea has a typical range of 15-30mg of caffeine per cup, with values usually falling on the lower end of that scale. Green tea has slightly more caffeine, with an average of 30-40mg per cup.

For comparison, black tea averages anywhere from 40-70mg of caffeine per cup, while coffee averages anywhere from 70-140mg, with about 90mg per cup being the most typical caffeine value.

### **Are There Any Health Benefits to Drinking Blooming Tea**

Every type of tea has a wonderful range of health benefits. All tea, whether we're talking about white, green, oolong, or black tea, comes from the same plant. The difference is in how the tea is grown and processed. This mildly affects the health benefits between, say a green tea and black tea, but there are some healthy attributes shared among all types of teas.

For example, we know that all teas are rich in antioxidants, with green tea being the most widely recognized for its status as an antioxidant powerhouse. Teas have also been shown to have anti-inflammatory properties, improve digestion, boost metabolism, enhance relaxation, and even offer some neuroprotective benefits. These are just a few of the reasons why we love tea.

Because blooming tea bundles are created with a base of white or green tea leaves, you get all of these benefits in every cup. The addition of flowers also adds some benefits, depending on which ones are added.

We know that rosehip is packed with vitamin C, making it a great immune system booster. There's some evidence to suggest that hibiscus flowers can help reduce blood pressure and high cholesterol levels.

Lavender is known for its calming effects and can be beneficial in relieving the severity of anxiety and depression for some people. Chamomile has similar properties and is well respected in the world of natural health for promoting healthy sleep. These are just a few examples of how certain flowers can enhance the already potent health benefits of tea.

## **Appreciating the Aesthetic of Blooming Tea**

While you can certainly enjoy the flavor, scent, and health benefits of blooming tea in any old mug, not using the right equipment takes away from the visual pleasure of the experience. The visual experience of blooming tea should be fully appreciated, and for that to happen, you need the right equipment.

Because of the visual component of flowering tea, glass tea mugs/cups and glass teapots are recommended. You want a cup or pot that's large enough to allow the tea bundle to bloom fully and for the intended shape of the bloom to take place.

Clear glass cups, mugs, and teapots are available specifically for this purpose, with some being elaborately constructed or detailed to enhance the visual appeal. It's important that you use glassware that's designed to withstand heat; otherwise, you risk the glass cracking or shattering, completely ruining the experience.

For many, the act of enjoying blooming tea is ritualistic. It's best to enjoy this tea when you have the time to sit and be present in the experience. Enjoy blooming tea when you can sit, relax, watch the bundle unfold and blossom, then quietly appreciate the beauty as the tea steeps.

Flowering tea can be part of a personal ritual or a ceremony that's shared with friends. It can be a casual experience or one that's more meditative and steeped with meaning. Either way, the act of enjoying blooming tea, no matter how you choose to do so, is one that gives you an opportunity to unplug, unwind, and appreciate the beauty of something so delicate and transient.

## **Preparing & Enjoying Blooming Tea**

- Preparing blooming tea requires a slightly different process than your average cup of tea. First, you want to use the proper equipment, as mentioned above. You can still certainly enjoy blooming tea without glass mugs or teapots, but the visual aspect will be affected.
- Second, use the purest water that you have access to. If you live in an area with clean-tasting tap water, then this is fine. If your tap water is hard or has even the slightest metallic taste to it, even if it is filtered, it's worth it to use purified water to maintain the integrity of the taste and scent of the tea bundle.
- Heat water to about 175-180°F. This is a good temperature for white and green teas. Using water that has come to a foil boil can pull out the bitter flavors in these teas and make them less pleasant to drink.

- This next step is one where there's a bit of disagreement on. Some choose to place their tea bundle in the mug or pot and then pour the hot water over it. This certainly works for blooming, but you have to be very gentle when pouring the water; otherwise, you risk jostling the tea bundle around. With more delicate bundles, this can even cause some of the tea leaves or flowers to break loose. A more preferred method is to first pour the water into the mug or pot, then gently add the tea bundle into the center.
- Let the tea steep for approximately 3-5 minutes. Three minutes is the average steeping time for white and green teas, but you really don't want to go beyond the 5-minute mark, no matter how pretty your bloom is to look at. At the 5 minute mark, you begin taking the risk of your tea becoming more bitter. So, sit with your tea for a few moments and enjoy the beautiful bloom before enjoying it.
- Some people like to leave their bloom in the cup or pot, but going along with the above point about overs-steeping, this really can take away from the flavor and enjoyment of your tea. It's best to remove the bloom and set it aside.
- Most tea bundles can be used more than once. You can almost always get a good quality tea off of the second use of a tea bundle, and sometimes even a third. This is providing that you stick to the suggested steeping time, which will still leave plenty of goodness to extract from the tea leaves and flowers for a second use. You don't get the dramatic blooming the second time, but the visual is still quite lovely.
- Fully bloomed tea bundles aren't really designed to handle aggressive stirring. If you need to flavor your tea with sweetener or if you want to add milk, do so after removing the bloom. This will also help preserve the bloom for a second use.

### **Enjoy Blooming Tea and Experience a Journey of the Senses**

Enjoying any type of tea is a journey of taste and scent, but beautiful blooming tea bundles add in the extra visual element for a true treat for the senses. With blooming tea enjoying its moment in the spotlight, there's more variety available than ever before. Now is the perfect time to try it and treat yourself to a beautiful, relaxing sensory experience.