

There's something to say about the presentation of a cup of tea. Similar to how a nice dinner just tastes better on good dinnerware, a cup of tea feels so much more indulgent when sipped from a nice teacup that perfectly fits your hand. While we might enjoy drinking tea from a nice vessel, such as a chinar teacup, does it really make a difference in how your tea tastes?

## Does Tea Really Taste Better In China?

The type of cup you enjoy your tea from can make a difference in how your tea tastes. It isn't just in your imagination that your tea tastes better out of your favorite teacup or mug, especially when compared to disposable cups made of paper, plastic, or Styrofoam.

The reason why tea tastes better in china/porcelain or ceramic mugs all has to do with how the components of the tea interact with the materials of the cup. Some prefer a teacup that looks beautiful, while others prefer characteristics like how the teacup feels in their hand or how well it retains heat.

It turns out that the perfect teacup is actually a marriage of functionality and aesthetics, and traditional fine china is a favorite among tea drinkers because it ranks highly in both categories.

## Why The Material of Your Teacup Matters

To put it simply, the right teacup has the power to completely transform your tea drinking experience. The size and design are important, which we'll get to in just a bit, but what the cup is made of is what really sets the stage when it comes to getting maximum enjoyment for your tea.

First, let's talk about disposable cups, like the kind you'd get from your local coffee shop or teahouse when you order your drink to-go. These cups are typically made from some type of thick paper, plastic, or Styrofoam. Depending on the material, there may also be a waxy layer that helps strengthen the cup to prevent leakage.

While these three types of material are all quite different from each other, they do share one very important characteristic. They're all very, very porous.

With cups that are porous, all that wonderful flavor and even the aroma of your tea sink in and get soaked up by the cup, rather than being released for you to fully enjoy. It's also not uncommon to be able to taste the paper, plastic, or Styrofoam in your tea because the hot liquid can pull compounds from the cups into your tea.

Some would argue that porous isn't necessarily bad, but it really depends on the material of the cup. For example, in cultures where tea is enjoyed frequently and daily, sometimes even during rituals, unglazed clay cups are sometimes used.

These types of porous cups made from clay contain iron and other minerals that interact with the tea, pulling specific components from the tea. Those who enjoy tea from these types of porous cups claim that the minerals in the cup help to balance the overall flavor of the tea and pull out some of the sharper or more bitter notes.

Even with that, there's a solid argument to be made that non-porous material, such as china, is best.

## Why China Is Best

For the purest flavor and aroma, minimal interaction between your tea and the cup it is in is the goal. China and porcelain cups are essentially the same, but other types of non-porous cups include glass or delicate bone china.

The reason these types of cups are preferred for tea is that their surfaces are non-porous and extremely smooth. There's nothing there to interact with the flavor components of your tea. These materials themselves do nothing to add or take away from the tea's flavor, but even with that, drinking from these types of cups does alter the overall tea drinking experience.

## Why Size and Shape Matter

There's a reason traditional teacups are shaped the way they are. To get a better picture of why this matters, consider the typical sturdy coffee mug. If you enjoy coffee, you know there's just something about holding the warm, thick mug in your hands with the aroma of the coffee coming up through the wide mouth of the mug. All of these features of a coffee mug are designed to enhance the experience.

The same is true for teacups, especially china. A china teacup can best be described as delicate. The cup itself is made of rather thin porcelain, the mouth of the cup is somewhat wide, and the lip is thin.

This design allows the tea to cool to a desirable drinking temperature rather quickly. This is especially important if you're steeping your tea into the cup. Unlike coffee, which can sit for what seems like forever in a thick, sturdy mug, tea has a certain "shelf life," after which time the flavor begins to be affected.

In a thin, wide-mouthed porcelain teacup, the time it takes for your tea to cool to a drinkable temperature is about the same amount of time that you should be steeping a cup of tea. All types of tea have a peak steeping or brewing time, but the average is in the ballpark of three to five minutes.

Porcelain teacups also have nice mouths that allow so much wonderful aroma to escape and reach your nose. They're narrow enough that the aroma is concentrated and directed right toward the nose but also wide enough to allow for more of the aroma to escape. Our sense of taste and smell are so closely connected that this cup design

allows for maximum fusion between the two senses and maximizes both the aroma and taste.

## What About Tea Mugs?

With all this focus on why china teacups are so perfect, it's important to know that there's no shame if you prefer your tea in a nice, thick glazed ceramic mug. In fact, some teas hold up really well in this type of cup.

Delicate, lighter teas, like white tea or green tea, do well in traditional china porcelain teacups. But darker, more robust teas that demand a longer steeping time are just as well suited for your sturdy tea mug as coffee.

One reason these types of mugs work well for darker tea is that they hold onto heat better. Considering that black tea and herbal teas can have a steep time that ranges from five to ten minutes, these types of mugs are better at retaining heat during that time.

Plus, the aroma coming from a more robust flavored cup of tea isn't as delicate as a white or green tea, so you'll still get all of those wonderful smells, even if you choose to drink from a mug rather than a teacup.

## What Is the Difference Between Porcelain and Bone China?

Porcelain china, sometimes called fine china, is made from a mixture of materials. Most often, fine china is made using a white clay called kaolin clay, and it's sometimes mixed with other materials, such as other types of clay, quartz, and feldspar. The fine porcelain cups are meticulously molded and then undergo a series of kiln firings that are done at very hot temperatures.

The main difference in composition between bone china and fine china is the addition of bone. Contrary to common misconception, there aren't actually thick pieces of bone mixed into the clay mixture, but rather dust or ash that's derived from cow bones.

Bone china is molded and formed the same way, but when it comes to the firing process, bone china is placed in a kiln at a lower temperature. The reason for this is that the addition of bone ash makes the clay softer and unsuitable for such high temperatures.

Bone china is almost always considered to be of higher quality than regular china. However, not all bone china is created equal. A porcelain teacup can be considered bone china if it contains any amount of bone ash. A teacup might contain a percentage as low as 5% bone ash and still be considered bone china. This doesn't necessarily mean that it's worth the hefty price tag, however.

While opinions vary, it's suggested that good, high-quality, fine-bone china should contain at least 30% bone ash. At this level, the difference the ash makes in the appearance and structure of the teacup is the most noticeable.

## Frequently Asked Questions About Bone China

### Is Bone China Made From Real Bones?

Partially, yes. Bone china is made from a porcelain mixture of clays and other elements, with the addition of ash that's derived from cow bones. Bone china doesn't contain any actual chunks or large pieces of bone, nor is it made entirely of bone.

### Is Bone China Better Than Fine China?

This is an ongoing debate. Collectors and connoisseurs will almost always argue that bone china surpasses other types of fine china. While there are some aesthetic qualities that make bone china superior to some, the overall difference in functionality is minimal.

### Why Does Tea Taste Better In Bone China?

Bone china is extremely smooth and fired in a way that the tannins and other compounds in tea don't adhere to the cup. For this reason, many say that tea does taste better in bone china, but this is purely a matter of preference. There are other wonderful porcelain and glass cups that suit tea just as nicely.

### Can You Use Bone China Every Day?

While your grandparents may have kept the expensive bone china locked up in a cabinet and reserved its use for special occasions only, bone china is actually durable enough for everyday use, as long as you handle it with care.

It's a combination of the design and material that makes china cups so fragile. However, they aren't necessarily any more or less fragile than less expensive teacups of the same design.

### Is Bone China Vegan-Friendly?

For someone who adheres to true vegan philosophy, no, bone china is not vegan-friendly. Bone ash that was derived from cows is used to construct bone china, which clearly goes against vegan philosophy.

That said, those who follow a vegan diet but don't strictly follow the other aspects of veganism may not have an issue using bone china. It's an ethical and moral issue that each person must decide for themselves.

## Can Bone China Go In the Dishwasher?

Yes, bone china can go in the dishwasher, as long as you take the proper precautions with it. The main concern of putting bone china in the dishwasher is that the likelihood of it breaking increases if any other dishes touch it during the wash cycle. However, if your bone china comes with strict instructions to stay away from the dishwasher, it's best to follow that advice.

## Is Bone China Microwave Safe?

Most bone china is microwave-safe. The main exception to this would be if the cup was embellished with metallic accents or designs.

## Teacup Design for the Best Tasting Tea

A traditional china teacup design is often regarded as the gold standard for enjoying tea. Its shape and design work especially well with more delicate teas, such as white or green tea. However, the tea experience is something that is so individual and personal that it's hard to argue that there's a wrong way to enjoy it. Whether it's in a fine china teacup or your favorite sturdy mug, enjoy your tea your way.