

Japanese Sencha tea is the most popular enjoyed type of tea in Japan. The delicate tea is chosen for its perfectly paired flavors, which are both slightly sweet and floral, with more noticeable grassy and vegetal notes and a hint of astringency. What's the backstory to one of the world's most favorite teas? Here's everything you want to know.

What Is Sencha Tea

Sencha is a type of green tea that is produced primarily in Japan. While Chinese Sencha tea does exist and is quite wonderful, Japanese Sencha is by far the most common and most favored.

All teas, except for herbal teas, come from the same plant called *Camellia sinensis*. The difference between the different types of white, green, oolong, and black teas comes down to how the tea plant is grown, harvested, and processed. Sencha falls into the family of green teas, which means it's moderately oxidized, being more vibrant in flavor and scent than white tea, but less robust and bitter than black tea.

What sets Sencha apart from other green teas is that it's grown in full sun, and it's steamed after harvesting to halt the oxidation process. Many other types of teas are processed using some sort of dry heat application, such as pan-firing.

Sencha is a significant component of Japan's tea industry. Estimates are that of all the tea produced in Japan, approximately 60-80% are Sencha. Even with such a huge production of Sencha, most of it never leaves Japan.

The History of Sencha Tea

It's no secret that Japan has had a long love affair with tea. History tells us that tea was first introduced to Japan by China at some point in the 12th century. Considering the overwhelming popularity of Sencha tea in Japan, you might think that this tea was one of the first enjoyed by the elite at the time. However, this is not the case.

It wasn't until about 500 years later, in the 17th century, that Sencha came to life in Japanese tea culture. Before this point, it was matcha that was the preferred tea throughout the country. Once introduced, Sencha quickly caught on in the tea culture of Japan, and it wasn't long before it quickly overtook matcha's number one spot as the preferred tea.

Fast forward to modern times, and these centuries later, Sencha still remains the most popular tea in Japan. While tea consumption in Japan and around the world ebbs and flows slightly, the Japanese consume about a pound and a half of tea per person every year, with the overwhelming majority of that being beautiful Sencha tea.

Taste and Scent Profiles of Sencha Tea

The leaves that make Sencha tea are steamed rather than pan-fired. This is the case with most Japanese teas compared to types of Chinese teas you might be familiar with. This steaming process is what lends Sencha its characteristic keynote flavors, along with the aroma that rises from the cup.

When you enjoy a cup of Japanese Sencha tea, you'll find a flavor profile that's refreshing and delicate but with definite notes of grassiness and also a bit earthy. Seaweed is another prominent tasting note that most people pick up on in Sencha tea. Some say the seaweed makes Sencha an acquired taste, but there are so many other nuances to balance it out that this tea manages to blend its delicateness and complexity perfectly.

With Sencha, you might also notice a bit of an aftertaste that lingers. Sencha can be described as mildly astringent, but with some notes of sweetness to balance it out. There are some notes of mild fruit with hints of floral that linger both on the palate and in the nose.

The color or hue of Sencha can vary from a very pale, light grassy green to a deeper, darker green in your cup. The color depends on how long you brew or steep the tea and also the type of tea you're using. More popular Sencha teabags offer a lighter hue to the tea, while powdered Sencha produces a deeper, almost emerald-like color that's similar to what you find with matcha.

How Sencha Tea Is Processed

Japanese Sencha tea is grown in full sun, with the leaves being picked from the first and second flush, which offer the most delicate and flavorful leaves and buds. Tea that comes from the very first flush in the spring at the beginning of the harvesting season is called Shincha and is considered to be the most exquisite of Sencha teas. Occasionally a third flush harvest is also done to produce Sencha, but ideally, this type of tea comes from the first or second.

Once the tea has been picked from the plant, the leaves are steamed to stop oxidation from taking place. Green teas like Sencha are less oxidized than oolong or black tea. The halted oxidation process is what keeps the tea such a beautiful shade of green and also offers grassy and vegetal notes. Because Sencha and other green teas are less oxidized, they also offer unique health benefits compared to darker teas, mostly because of their higher antioxidant capacity and nutrient value.

Once the tea leaves have been steamed, they are then rolled and shaped before drying. This process is what gives Sencha tea leaves their characteristic cylindrical shape. Some Sencha leaves are also ground into a powder, similar to matcha, but this is a much less common form of the tea.

The final step in processing Sencha tea is sorting. If you're a tea connoisseur or have even done a little window shopping for teas, you know there is a tremendous range of

quality in Sencha that's often reflected in the price. The highest quality Sencha leaves are separated and sold as premium tea. The price difference among teas is more than just marketing. There truly are quality differences that exist, even among a singular type of tea.

What's the Difference Between Sencha & Matcha Tea ?

Sencha and matcha are two types of green tea and are sometimes confused as being the same tea – or at least similar enough that they're basically the same. This seems to be especially true when we're talking about powdered Sencha, which does closely resemble Matcha tea powder.

All that said, there are significant differences between the two teas.

- **Growing & Tea Production:** One of the main areas of difference between Sencha and Matcha is how the teas are grown and processed. Sencha is grown in full sun, while matcha is grown in shadier conditions. Sencha is also steamed and typically sold in loose leaf tea as opposed to powder (although powdered forms of the Sencha are available. Matcha is typically laid flat to dry; then leaves are ground into a powder.
- **Caffeine Content:** Both Sencha and Matcha are green teas, so they do have some caffeine, but not as much as black teas. These two green teas are similar in caffeine content, but for different reasons. Sencha tea leaves are steamed, giving them a slight boost in caffeine. Matcha, on the other hand, is grown in the shade, which creates a tea with more caffeine than sun-grown varieties. In the end, it all mostly averages out but can still vary on factors, including how the teas are brewed.
- **Color:** Both Sencha and Matcha offer a beautiful green hue to your teacup. Matcha is known for its brighter, light emerald-colored hue. The way that Matcha tea is prepared lends to a thicker drink, so matcha is less translucent than most other types of tea. Sencha offers more of a tone-down green hue that can range from the palest yellow-green to a brighter, grassier color.
- **Brewing & Preparation:** The most popular form of Sencha is a loose leaf tea that is brewed by steeping in hot water. You can purchase Sencha tea bags or the loose leaf tea that is brewed using a tea diffuser or simply steeped in the water. The most popular form of matcha is a powder that dissolves in hot water. Matcha preparation is enhanced using a special whisk that helps the tea dissolve and also produces a nice froth.
- **Taste Profile & Scent:** Both teas are slightly astringent. In Sencha, this astringency is balanced out with grassy and earthy notes and a more robust vegetal flavor and scent. Sencha is slightly sweet, but the sweetness is more of a subtle background note. Matcha is sweeter than Sencha but also contains some

vegetal and grassy notes. Matcha is a more viscous tea, so its flavors tend to linger on the palate a bit longer.

- **Enjoyment:** Sencha, although somewhat unique in its flavor profile, offers an experience that similar to enjoying just about any other type of tea. Matcha is different, and its presentation, when done the traditional style, is ceremonious. Some people have a special bowl that they drink their matcha from since it's thicker than typical tea. A Matcha bowl also offers a nice ceremonious element to the experience.

Types of Sencha Tea

Sencha isn't a singular type of tea but rather a broader umbrella that defines the growing, harvesting, and processing conditions, with several different types of tea falling underneath the umbrella. Here are several of the most commonly enjoyed types of Sencha tea.

Shincha

Shincha is also called "new tea" and comes from the first harvest of the season. Shincha is considered a premium among Sencha tea for several reasons, including its fresh, grassy sweetness in both flavor and scent. Shincha is also one of the most nutritious of Sencha tea, holding in a bounty of nutrients, amino acids, and antioxidants from the growing season.

Shincha is a prized tea in Japan and is enjoyed plentifully when it first comes to market in the spring. This beautiful, exquisite tea is more difficult to find outside of Japan since most of it stays in the country. For the Shincha tea that is exported outside of Japan, the cost is typically noticeably higher than what you'll pay for other types of Sencha tea.

Asamushi

Asamushi Sencha undergoes a very short steaming period and is lightly steamed for only about 20 to 30 seconds. The light steaming produces a very delicate tea that's lighter in color and also in taste. People who have tried Sencha and found it to be a bit too vegetal and acidic for their tastes might like to give Asamushi a try as the flavor notes are much more subtle.

The flavor profile of Asamushi is slightly creamy, slightly sweet, with complimentary notes of umami. Even with its slight creaminess, Asamushi is delicate and offers a refreshing finish.

Chumushi

Chumushi Sencha undergoes a slightly longer steaming period than Asamushi. Although the difference is small in relative terms, it leaves a noticeable mark on the

tasting notes. Chumushi is typically steamed for at least 30 seconds, with some being steamed for up to a full minute.

Chumushi is a good choice of Sencha for everyday enjoyment. The floral top notes and umami that show up mid-palate complement each other beautifully. Being a Sencha tea, there are also some noticeable vegetal notes, mostly lingering in the finish.

Fukamushi

Fukamushi is a tea that's on the longer-steeping -time end of the spectrum of Sencha teas. Fukamushi is steamed for at least a minute, sometimes longer. The extended steaming breaks down the tea leaves more than you'll find with other Sencha teas. This creates a more robust cup of tea in terms of flavor.

When Fukamushi Sencha is perfectly brewed, you'll notice more sweetness and less astringency than with more lightly steamed types of Sencha. Fukamushi has a darker, richer green hue than lightly steamed teas.

One detail to note about Fukamushi is that because of the extended steaming and the leaves becoming more fragile. You'll often find broken tea leaves in your package and more tea residue at the bottom of your cup or teapot. Some mistake this as a sign of inferior tea, which in this case it is not. This is simply how Fukamushi is. If you're interested in playing around with tea leaf readings, this would be a great tea to do it with.

Caffeine Content In Sencha

Sencha is a green tea, which means it contains a mild to moderate amount of caffeine per cup. There's a significant range of caffeine content in green tea, depending on the type of tea but also on how long the tea is steeped. A quick look at different brands of Sencha tea offers a range of about 15mg to 70mg per cup. Caffeine content at the upper end of this range is usually due to over-steeping the tea in water that's too hot.

One thing to note is that although Sencha is strongly associated with Japanese teas, you can also purchase Chinese Sencha. Sencha that is grown and produced in China typically has less caffeine than the Sencha that's grown in Japan. This has a lot to do with the processing since steamed tea leaves, including Japanese Sencha, have more caffeine than other types of pan-fired teas. In contrast, Chinese Sencha is pan-fired.

One more factor in the caffeine content of Sencha is the growing conditions. Any tea that is grown in the shade will have more caffeine than tea that is harvested from plants grown in full sun. Sencha is grown in full sun, which is why it has less caffeine than similar shade-grown green teas, such as Matcha or Gyokuro.

On average, most Sencha teas come in at around 20mg -30mg, which is about standard for green tea of all varieties. If you're looking for a little caffeine boost from

your tea, then Sencha will provide exactly that. If you're sensitive to caffeine but can tolerate a small amount, steep or brew your Sencha for about 2 minutes, and you have a delicate, flavorful cup of tea that's also fairly light on caffeine.

Health Benefits of Sencha Tea

Heart Health

Cardiovascular disease remains as the leading cause of death in the western world. Stress, diet, and other lifestyle factors all play a role, but green tea, including Sencha, is something simple you can enjoy daily that offers cardiovascular benefits.

Studies show that people who consume green tea daily have a significantly lower risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality from heart disease than those who consume green tea only occasionally or not at all. Once again, it's all those wonderful polyphenols in green tea that are hard at work, offering many health benefits, including protection against cardiovascular disease.

Important Element of an Anti-Cancer Diet

Green tea is well-studied for its cancer-fighting properties. The National Cancer Institute lists green tea as being a beneficial part for its anti-cancer properties, mostly stemming from the polyphenols found in green tea and its heavy antioxidant load.

The antioxidants in green tea are powerful in disrupting the pathways of free radicals, stopping them from causing damage to the cell's DNA. Green tea has also been shown in studies to inhibit angiogenesis, which is the formation of new blood vessels that allow tumors to grow. Sencha tea isn't by any means a stand-alone cancer treatment, but it can be a very important part of an anti-cancer diet.

May Help Accelerate Weight Loss

There's no need to take expensive weight loss pills containing green tea when enjoying a cup of Sencha daily can help aid in weight loss. The combination of the compounds in green tea, including catechins and caffeine, work synergistically to support a healthy metabolism.

Green tea helps aid in weight loss through a combination of thermogenesis and fat oxidation. If you're looking to lose weight, try replacing one or two other types of beverages daily with Sencha or other types of green tea.

Protects Oral Health

Where other types of beverages, like carbonated sodas, are detrimental to oral health, green tea shows positive benefits. Green teas like Sencha are loaded with antioxidant,

anti-inflammatory, and anti-microbial properties. This is a trifecta of benefits that will help protect your teeth and gums with regular consumption.

Focus & Energy

Green tea is wonderful for enhancing focus and offering a nice boost of energy throughout the day. The combination of all the hard-working compounds in green tea, coupled with the moderate caffeine content, make this the perfect mid-day beverage for when you're feeling the mid-day slump.

Brewing & Enjoying Sencha Tea

- Sencha is an easy tea to brew and enjoy. It's prepared similar to the way you would prepare any loose leaf tea, but as with all tea, the temperature and steeping time are important for the best flavor.
- A good ration of loose leaf tea is about a teaspoon to six ounces of water. You'll want a heaping teaspoon or about a teaspoon and a half if you're using a large 8-ounce mug or cup. If you're Sencha is already neatly packaged in a teabag, just follow the directions on the package.
- Use clean, filtered water. If you have high-quality tap water or a good filter on your faucet, then water from your home is fine. If your water is hard or tastes too strongly of minerals, opt for purchased drinking water.
- Some people prefer to warm their teacup ahead of time. This will help your tea retain its heat in the cup longer without overheating the water. To do this, heat some water to the point that it moves past a simmer but not quite boiling. Pour the water into your cup and let it sit while you're preparing your tea.
- For Sencha, you want to heat your water to about 170°F. If you're accustomed to bringing your tea water to a full boil, you'll want to stop short of that. Water that is too hot will bring out more bitterness in Sencha and disrupt its balance of flavors. At 170°F, water has just moved past the simmering point, and you'll have some good steam, but it won't yet be boiling.
- Sencha tea should steep for about two minutes. Lightly steamed tea, such as Asamushi, should steep for one to two minutes since the flavors are more delicate and are released into the water differently than a tea that is steamed longer during processing.
- Pour and enjoy. Sencha tea is best enjoyed without additives such as sweeteners or milk, but this is your cup of tea, so enjoy it however you like it.

Bottom Line

Sencha is the most widely consumed tea in Japan, and with its delicate, grassy notes and a hint of sweetness, it's no wonder that the rest of the world is falling in love with it also. Sencha is versatile, being suitable as a ceremony tea or one that can be enjoyed for its flavor and health benefits every day.

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