

An Introduction to Gongfu Tea Brewing

Gongfu is a Chinese way of brewing tea where the best characteristics of good loose-leaf tea are brought out by using a much higher leaf-to-water ratio than in standard brewing. *Gōngfūchá* (功夫茶) or gongfu tea means **tea made with skill**. Consistently good steeping requires precision, control over your equipment, and understanding the effects of many different variables. **The result is worth the effort!**

What you will need:



loose-leaf tea

a *gàiwǎn* (盖碗, Chinese tea bowl) or a small teapot

cups

water, 1-2 quarts for a session - spring or distilled water is preferred

a kettle or pot to heat your water

a tea tray or towel to catch spills

Get comfortable with handling the gaiwan. When you are brewing the tea, you will be using hot water. **To avoid burning yourself, it is best to practice handling the gaiwan with cold water a few times to get accustomed to holding and pouring.**

The most common way to hold the gaiwan is with one hand. You may adjust the lid so that it is slightly off center to allow liquid to pour while using the lid to strain the tea leaves from pouring into your cup.



Grip the rim of the gaiwan with your thumb and middle finger while holding the lid of the gaiwan in place with your index finger.

Carefully pour the liquid into the cups. To allow for an even steep, place the cups together and start pouring into one and then continue moving back and forth over all of the cups, so that the tea is evenly distributed.

Be patient as this takes practice. Tea and water will spill and your fingers will get hot. If it is easier for you, you can hold the gaiwan with one hand while holding the lid in place with the other hand. If your fingers get too hot, try rubbing your earlobe with your hot fingers – it sounds odd but it really helps!

Ready to Brew!

1. Empty the tea into the gaiwan. Fill the gaiwan 1/2 to 2/3 full of dry tea depending on the type of tea.
2. Rinse the tea. Pour heated water into the gaiwan. Quickly pour the liquid out into the cups and your fair cup if you're using one and over your tea pet (optional). This step warms everything up and helps to wake up the tea.
3. Now you are ready for your first steep. Repeat step 2, but count 10 seconds before pouring your tea. Pour from cup to cup so that no cup has a stronger steep than any other.
4. Enjoy your tea. Take a moment to smell the underside of the gaiwan lid. Observe the color of the brew, the aroma of the liquor and the infused leaves. Slurp the tea. Savor the flavor. Breathe deeply. Reflect on the flavor.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 for as many steeps as you wish or as the tea will tolerate. Increase steeping time by 5, 10 or 15 second intervals as you like. There is plenty of room to make the ritual your own. There are many schools of thought on steeping times, but ultimately it should suit your personal taste. If you forget or lose count, don't worry: the experience is about enjoying the tea.

Suggested Vocabulary for Tea Evaluation

Body: *perception of viscosity* | **Delicate** → **Light** → **Full** → **Very Full**

Astringency: *puckery drying sensation, caused by polyphenols* | **Smooth** (very low) → **Bright** (light to medium) → **Lively/Brisk** (medium) → **Pungent** (bold)

Finish: *feeling on the palate after swallowing* | **Airy/Soft** → **Evaporating/Quick** → **Juicy/Mouthwatering** → **Lingering/Aromatic** → **Drying/Tannic**

Flavor: *aromatic elements manifested as perceived taste on the palate*

Garden/Vegetable	Fruit/Floral	Earthy/Savory	Mineral/Elemental	Nutty/Bakery/Spice	Starch/Grain
Vegetal (cooked)	Light floral (lilac,	Woody	Salty	Toasty	Malty
Seaweed	honeysuckle)	Pine	Clay	Biscuit/yeast	Brown rice
Grassy	Deep floral (lily,	Earthy	River stones	Butter/cream	Barley
Herbal	rose, geranium)	Leather	Oceanic	Baking spice	Winter squash
Sweet hay	Honey	Tobacco	Metallic	Peppercorn	Yam
Leafy greens	Citrus fruit	Mushroom	Flint	Cocoa powder	Taro root
Spring peas	Apple/pear	Roasted	Bookstore/antique	Warmed sugar	Legume/lentil
Alfalfa/sprouts	Pit fruit	Smoky		Caramel	
Camphor/menthol	Berry/cherry	Umami (savory)		Nutty	
Wintergreen/mint	Raisin/fig/date	Meaty		Toffee	
	Grape (white or red)				
	Melon				
	Tropical fruit				