



## From Leaf to Cup: The Craft of Matcha and How to Enjoy It Perfectly

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Matcha is a vividly colored, stone-ground green tea made from the *Camellia sinensis* leaves. While it resembles green tea powder, the similarities end there. Unfortunately, "matcha" is often used loosely and many types of green tea powder are inaccurately referred to as matcha. All matcha is powdered green tea, but not all powdered green tea is matcha. Each type has distinct characteristics in terms of growing origins, texture, color, flavor and uses.

Green tea cultivation began in China, and spread to other countries, whereas matcha is exclusively produced in Japan. In China, green tea is processed by being harvested, withering very briefly, and then pan-firing to halt oxidation. Japanese matcha, however, is green tea ground into a powder form that is grown, harvested, and processed using specific methods unique to matcha.

### Key points defining true matcha include:

- **Shading:** During the last month of cultivation, tea plants are shaded. Traditionally, they were covered with bamboo or straw mats, but shade cloth is now more commonly used because it is easier to handle. During the spring, only the finest, youngest leaves from the top of the plant are plucked. Shading the tea plant increases chlorophyll levels in the leaves, contributing to matcha's vibrant color. It also boosts the production of amino acids, particularly L-theanine, which imparts a rich, unique umami flavor with a hint of sweetness. L-theanine is known for its calming effects and its ability to enhance focus.
- **Steaming:** Next, the leaves are quickly steamed to prevent oxidation, preserving their beautiful green color and retaining the health benefits.
- **Drying and Processing:** After steaming, the leaves are air-dried in a large tunnel, sorted, and stripped of stems and veins, leaving only the pure leaf, known as tencha (which means 'tea for grinding' in Japanese). Different grades of tencha, such as Premium Grade, Ceremonial Grade, and Culinary Grade, determine the quality of the matcha. The tencha is then refrigerated until it is ready to be ground into powder.
- **Grinding:** Traditionally, a manual granite stone was used to grind the leaves into a fine powder. Today, large factories use modern electric grinding stones that can be continuously fed automatically to process the leaves.
- **Caffeine Content:** Matcha has about the same amount of caffeine as black tea, between 60 to 70mg, which is less than in coffee. Many people report that matcha provides a feel-good, uplifting sensation without the jitters associated with coffee. This is thanks to L-theanine, which is known to elevate levels of GABA, dopamine and serotonin, which in turn promote relaxation and reduce anxiety levels.
- **Nutritional Benefits:** With traditional green tea, we only drink the steeped liquid, whereas with matcha, the entire leaf is consumed. This provides a concentrated source of nutrients and antioxidants for optimal health benefits. Matcha contains higher antioxidant levels per gram than any other known tea!





### Preparing Matcha is easy:

1. **Heat the Water:** Bring cold spring water to a temperature of 180°F, just below boiling.
2. **Measure the Matcha:** Add 1/2 teaspoon of matcha powder into a matcha bowl or wide-mouthed mug.
3. **Add Water:** Pour 2-3 ounces of the hot water into the bowl with the matcha powder.
4. **Whisk to Froth:** Using a bamboo whisk, whisk the mixture briskly in an 'M' or 'W' motion until a frothy layer forms on top.
5. **Add Additional Water:** Add up to 6 more ounces of hot water to the bowl if you prefer a lighter taste.
6. **Enjoy!**



### Additional Tips for the Perfect Matcha:

- **Water Amount:** Do not add more than 3 ounces of hot water before whisking. Excess water will prevent the formation of froth.
- **Water Temperature:** Use water that is just below boiling to prevent bitterness and to preserve the smooth, mild taste of Matcha. Boiling water can release tannins, which may make the tea taste harsh.
- **Cleaning:** Rinse your whisk with water only. To maintain its shape and prevent molding, store it on a whisk holder if possible.

**Final Note:** Matcha is gaining popularity around the world, both for drinking and for culinary use, due to its numerous health benefits and unique, delicious flavor. When incorporating matcha into your recipes, opt for high-quality culinary grade matcha to ensure vibrant color, aromatic fragrance, and maximum nutritional value. Its bold flavor complements a wide range of ingredients, so don't hesitate to experiment with matcha-flavored desserts, beverages, and other creative culinary treats!

