



# How to Make Matcha

A complete guide on how to make a tasty cup of Matcha

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## Table of Contents

<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>1</b>
History.....	2
How Matcha is Made.....	2
Tea Selection.....	3
<b>Traditional Method</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Tools you will need.....	4
Steps to make using the Traditional Method.....	5
<b>At Home Method: Using Traditional Tools</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Tools you will need.....	6
Steps to make using the traditional tools at home.....	7
<b>At Home Method: Using Modern Tools</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Tools you will need.....	8
Steps to make using the modern tools at home.....	9
Common Errors and How to Solve Them.....	10
Conclusion:.....	11
References:.....	12

## Introduction

Welcome to the How to Make Matcha user manual. In this document, you will learn how to make matcha in three ways: the traditional tea ceremony, and two at-home methods that use traditional and modern tools. Each will also describe food pairings that go well with matcha. Later sections describe common issues and how to resolve them.

Before we get to the three methods to make matcha, you can find a glossary for important terms, a brief history of matcha, a description of how matcha is made, how to select matcha and a section for other uses of matcha.

The goal of this user manual is to help you learn how to make a good cup of matcha so you can enjoy this tasty cup of tea.

Happy sipping!



## Glossary

This is a short list of words that will make it easier for you to understand this user manual.

**Chlorophyll:** The green pigment that is needed for photosynthesis, which is credited to have health benefits

**Tea table:** is the Camilla Sensis plants where the height is maintained to a bush height for easy picking

**Oxidation:** this is the chemical process in which exposure to oxygen reacts with molecules, in this case in the tea leaves, that changes their taste, colour and aroma

**Flush:** this is the term that is used to describe when the tea leaves were picked, and this changes the taste and quality of the tea leaves. This is due to the change in climate, temperature and precipitation, throughout the year. In general, there are about 4-5 flushes, depending on the growing region. Most matcha comes from the first two flushes, with the first spring flush being the preferred and sought-after flush for matcha due to its fresh and delicate flavour.

## History

The legendary first cup of tea was had by the Chinese Emperor Shen Nong while sitting in his Camellia Garden, when a leaf from the Camellia tree accidentally dropped into his hot water, creating tea. While this is probably more myth than reality, it has become part of tea culture. All tea, excluding rooibos and herbal teas, comes from the Camellia Sinensis plant. The difference between black, green, oolong, and white tea is how they are processed. Black is allowed to oxidize before being dried. Oolong is allowed to oxidize slightly before being steamed to stop the oxidation; this means it lies between black and green tea in both flavour and tea preparation. Green tea is either roasted or steamed immediately after picking to prevent oxidation. Finally, white tea is a very new-growth tea that still has fine hairs on the leaves when they're picked and is dried similarly to green tea to preserve the delicate hairs on the leaves; this gives the leaves a white appearance once dried.

Green tea was first grown and produced in China; then brought over to Japan by Buddhist Monks. These Monks were the first to start growing green tea while also developing the tea ceremony that included matcha. The tea ceremony was used by Japanese monks to give them a stable energy to help them meditate for the long hours that they were required as Buddhist monks. Nowadays, we know that this stable energy comes from the combination of caffeine and a non-protein amino acid called L-theanine. While caffeine gives you a high-energy burst, the L-theanine allows for a more stable, less spiky kind of energy that lasts longer than your typical caffeine hit.

## How Matcha is Made

All tea is made from the young leaves and leaf buds of the Camilla Sensis plant. The key difference between white, green, oolong, and black tea is how the leaves are processed, allowing for different levels of oxidation, the same process that turns your apple slices brown. The longer the tea leaves are allowed to be left out before being dried, the darker the tea leaves get, giving you the black tea. Green tea is made from young tea leaves that are dried quickly after being picked to avoid any oxidation, which gives the tea its bright, fresh flavours. Matcha is made from green tea that is then ground into a fine powder. The flavour is therefore very similar to green tea, but stronger since you are drinking the whole leaf rather than just the water flavoured by the leaf.

To get the bright green colour that matcha is known for, matcha is grown in a way to boost the concentration of chlorophyll. To do this, the tea table is shaded by a shade cloth, which limits the amount of sun that reaches the leaves, causing the plants to produce more chlorophyll in the leaves to meet their energy needs to grow. Once the young leaves are ready to pick, the shade cloth is lifted, the leaves are picked, quickly dried and ground.

## Tea Selection

When picking the matcha that you are going to buy, there are a few things to consider: the quality, your reason to drink matcha, your personal taste and cost. These characteristics can be grouped into matcha grades. This can be confusing, as there are no regulations on these grades, which can make it more challenging when shopping for matcha. The common grades are: Culinary, Premium, and Ceremonial. Let's break it down.

### Culinary Grade

Culinary is generally what you will find in the grocery stores and will generally have a lower price point. This is because of the quality of the tea, where it is grown and how it is processed. Culinary matcha often uses tea leaves from later flushes that can have a stronger, more bitter taste. These tea leaves can still be grown in Japan; however, the leaves can also come from China, which can impact flavour and colour. The colour will be a green-brown to a green-yellow colour, since it can contain less chlorophyll. This can be due to the tea leaves not being shaded while growing, which is a costly and high-effort part of growing matcha tea. Culinary-grade matcha is also mechanically ground, so the texture can be grittier and won't dissolve into matcha drinks as well. However, the bolder flavour, grittier texture and cost do make this grade of matcha better for cooking and baking.

### Premium Grade

This is the mild ground when it comes to matcha, which will often be reflected in the price. Matcha in the premium grade will likely be grown in Japan but use leaves from second or third flushes, which will impact the flavour, making it bolder and possibly more bitter depending on how it's grown. The colour will be a darker, earthier green colour.

### Ceremonial Grade

Ceremonial-grade matcha is the highest grade. This matcha is shade-grown and picked during the first or second flush, giving it a bright green colour and bright, fresh and generally less bitter flavour. These are often single origin, meaning that they are from one farm; this means that they can have a nuance in flavours between different tea farms. Some might have stronger umami flavours, which can taste a bit fishy like seaweed, while others will have a bright, fresh green flavour. Ceremonial tea is also stone ground, giving it a finer texture that dissolves better in water, giving a finer final texture to matcha drinks. Considering the production, quality and farm scale of ceremonial matcha, expect to pay more for ceremonial grade than for premium or culinary matcha.

## The Traditional Tea Ceremony Method

The Japanese Tea Ceremony is based on Buddhist practices and principles, mainly harmony, respect, purity and tranquillity. While drinking matcha tea is central to the ceremony, it is a practice of mindfulness and a show of harmony, respect, purity and tranquillity. Throughout the process and even preparation before the ceremony, their values are central. This means that the steps are highly meaningful and purposeful. To signify the values, the ceremony emphasizes cleanliness, minimalism, beauty, lighting, and actions that show respect, like bowing and arranged seating. Traditional tea ceremonies are led by a host who makes the tea for the guests to enjoy.

### Tools used

**Chawan or tea bowl:** a heavy clay bowl that is often handmade with one decorative side that will be presented towards the guest when it is ready to be served.

**Chasen:** This bamboo whisk is made out of a single piece of bamboo, with one end being split into thin curled bristles. As these bristles can be fragile, warming up the chasen before use in hot water can prevent the bristles from breaking.

**Chashaku:** This is a bamboo tea scoop that is used to measure the matcha

**Natsume or Chaire:** the container that holds the matcha

**Kensui:** a bowl for wastewater that was used for cleaning

**Fukusa:** The silk cloth used by the host for cleaning as part of the ritual to signify purity

**Hishaku:** A long-handled bamboo ladle to distribute the hot water

**Kama:** This is traditionally an iron kettle, but can be an electric kettle in more modern tea ceremonies

**Mizusashi:** holds water that is used for rinsing the tea bowl and tea whisk, as well as adding water into the kettle when needed.

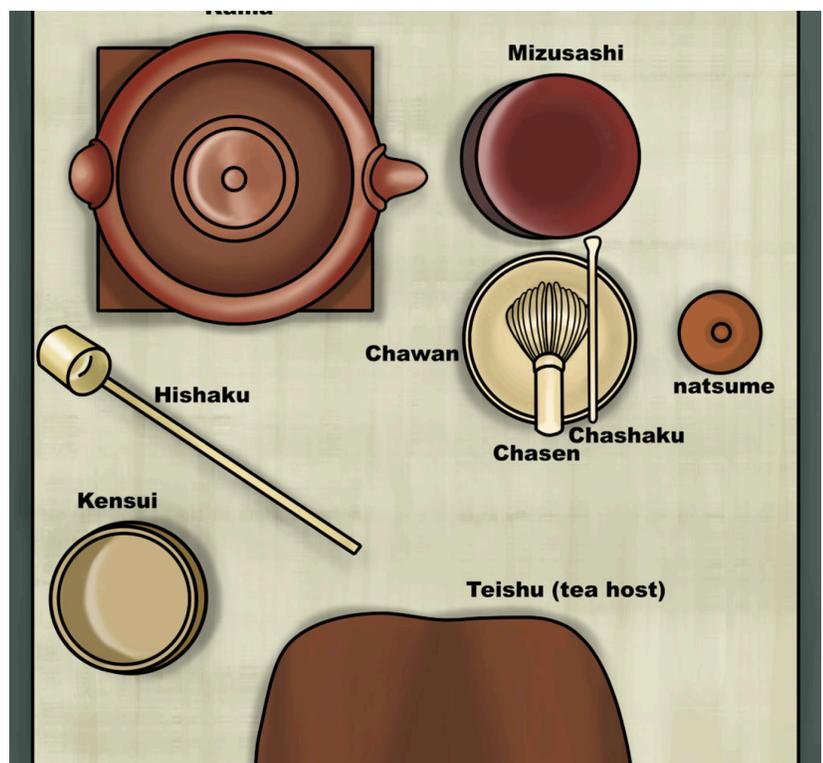


Figure #1: from Mai-ko website article Utensils for Japanese tea ceremony written by Adamm Acar, PhD

## Steps to make matcha using the Traditional Tea Ceremony Method

1. **Start by sending out invitations to guests.** This is a formal ceremony; an invitation to the ceremony is the first step, as it shows respect to the guests as well as sets the tone of the ceremony. This should be done a few weeks in advance.
2. **Prepare the room for the ceremony.** As beauty, tranquillity, and harmony are important to the tea ceremony, it is important to set up a calm and peaceful environment. This can include selecting the Chawan and other tea ware that you want to use, as well as flora arrangements, art, incense and cushions for the guest to kneel on. Minimalism should be kept in mind while setting up the room.
3. **Prepare the matcha.** Just prior to your guest arriving, prepare the matcha by sifting the matcha through a fine mesh sieve to get rid of any clumps and store the sifted matcha in the natsume.

4. **Welcome the guest.** It is time to welcome the guests, which is done by guiding them to wash their hands to represent purifying themselves prior to entering the tearoom and exchanging deep, respectful bows as they enter the room. The guests will follow the host into the tearoom. Guests are seated according to rank, be it seniority or age. Once seated, the host will welcome and acknowledge each of the guests to show respect, as seen in Figure 2. Sweets can be served at this time.



Figure #2: from Historical Chanoyu by Herbert E. Plutschow (1986)

5. **Clean the tools.** As a show of respect and purity, all tools will be cleaned using water from the Kama and discarding the used water into the Kensui and then wiped down using the fukusa, which is folded purposely between cleaning each utensil. As seen in Figure 3.



Figure #3: from Historical Chanoyu by Herbert E. Plutschow (1986)

6. **Make the Matcha.** The host will now start making the matcha for the guests, while the guests observe, appreciate and comment on the way the tea is being made.

Here are the steps to make the matcha:

- a. Start preheating the chawan but pouring boiling water from the kama into it. Warm up the chasen as well by adding it to the boiling water in the chawan, which will make it whisk better and prevent breakage.
- b. Remove the Chasen and set it handle side down. Empty the water into the kensui, wipe it out using the fukusa.
- c. Into the warmed and dry chawan, add two scoops of matcha using the chashuka; this will be about 2-3 grams of matcha powder. To the matcha, add about 60 ml of non-boiling water to the chawan.
- d. Start whisking the matcha in vigorous zigzag motions until a fine foam forms on the surface of the tea. As seen in Figure 4.



Figure #4: from *Historical Chanoyu* by Herbert E. Plutschow (1986)

7. **Present the tea to the guests.** Gently rotate the chawan so that the most decorative side of the bowl is visible to the guests. The host will present the matcha to the guest of honour or person of highest rank, who was established during seating.
8. **Each guest will take a sip,** starting with the guest of honour or of the highest rank. Wiping down the lip of the chawan with their own fukusa before passing it to the next guest. Once finished, the chawan is returned to the host for them to clean it. This brings the ceremony to an end

## Tea Pairing

Traditional tea ceremonies are commonly served with a sweet treat called higashi or dried confections. These balance the bitterness of the matcha without adding anything to the matcha itself. These include

- ❖ Small rock candies called Konpeitou
- ❖ Sweet baked goodies called Senbei
- ❖ Shaped dried sweets called Rakugan

## At Home Method: Using Traditional Tools

While the traditional tea ceremony is an amazing experience, many of us who enjoy matcha won't have the ability to go to one regularly. That's where the at-home methods come in. This method will use some of the traditional tools like the chawan, chasen and chashaku.

### Tools you will need

**Chawan or tea bowl:** a heavy clay bowl that is often handmade.

**Chasen:** This bamboo whisk is made out of a single piece of bamboo, with one end being split into thin curled bristles. As these bristles can be fragile, warming up the chasen before use in hot water can prevent the bristles from breaking. As these are also a natural product, they should be replaced every 4-6 months as they can mold especially if not dried properly or if they are stored in a humid environment.

**Chashaku:** This is a bamboo tea scoop that is used to measure the matcha, or you can use a ½ tsp measuring spoon

**Any extra cup:** this is used to warm up the chasen

**Serving cup or bowl:** this is a personal preference, pick your favourite ceramic or glass cup to drink your matcha out of.

**Metal Sieve:** It's helpful to get clumps out, which helps incorporate the matcha better in the water and to avoid unpleasant lumps.

**Kettle:** to boil the water in

### Additional tool

**Chasen stand:** while not necessary to make matcha; however, it can extend the life of your chasen and help it keep its shape.



## Steps to make matcha using the traditional tools at home

1. Bring water to a boil in a kettle, turn it off once it reaches a boil and wait for the bubbles to stop.
2. Once the bubbles have stopped, pour the water to fill your extra cup about halfway. Put your chasen into boiling water to allow it to warm up and rehydrate. This will make the bamboo more flexible and prevent breakage.
3. While the chasen is warming up, add either two scoops of matcha using the chashaku or one ½ tsp into the metal sieve over the chawan. Use the back of the chashaku or spoon to gently push the matcha through the sieve to remove any lumps. Take your time as this allows the water to cool, which is important to prevent the matcha from tasting bitter.
4. Without reheating the water, now add about 60 ml of water, enough to cover the matcha. Start vigorously whisking in a zig-zag pattern. Be careful not to whisk so hard that the tea splashes out of the chawan. Whisk until the colour is uniform, and the matcha stays suspended in the water.
5. Rinse the chasen with a small amount of water or gently whisk it in the cup from step 2 to clean it. Then store it on a chasen stand or on its handle in a dry area.
6. You can drink directly out of the chawan or transfer it into a favourite mug or glass. At this point, you can add a sweetener or milk of choice to make a warm latte-style drink or pour it over ice with a base of your choice (lemonade, coconut water, soda or milk) to make a cold drink.

### Tea Pairing

Some more traditional food pairings that go well with matcha include seasonal fruits, nuts and Japanese snacks like mochi, dorayaki or taiyaki.

In the photo to the right, the matcha is served with honey and soymilk and is paired with:

- ❖ Ripe Persimmons
- ❖ Roasted Chestnuts
- ❖ Dorayaki, pancakes filled with a sweet red bean paste.



## At Home Method: Using Modern Tools

While the traditional tea ceremony is an amazing experience, many of us who enjoy matcha won't have the ability to go to one regularly. That's where the at-home methods come in. Using more modern tools like an electric whisk or milk frother simplifies the process and the number of tools needed.

### Tools you will need

**Chawan or tea bowl:** a heavy clay bowl that is often handmade with one derivative side that will be presented towards the guest when it is ready to be served.

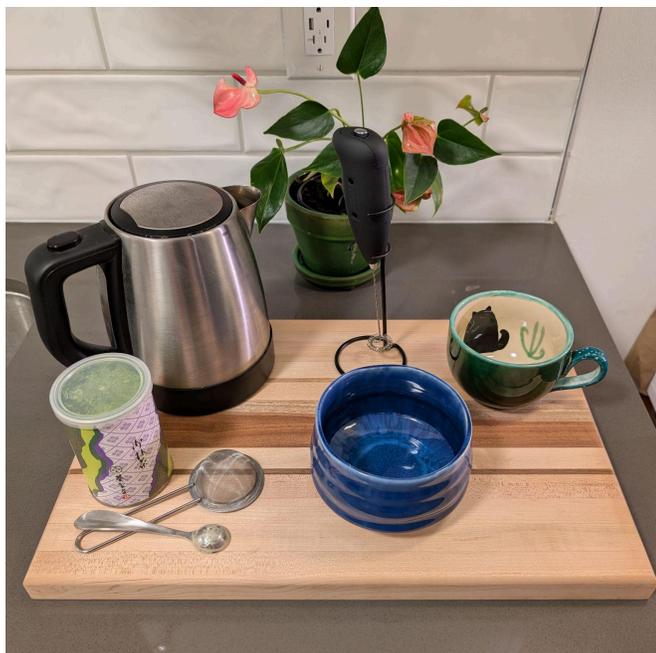
**Milk frother or electric whisk:** This is a more modern tool that can replace the chasen.

**Chashaku:** This is a bamboo tea scoop that is used to measure the matcha, or you can use a ½ tsp measuring spoon

**Serving cup or bowl:** this is a personal preference; pick your favourite ceramic or glass to drink your matcha out of.

**Metal Sieve:** it's helpful to get clumps out, to incorporate the matcha better in the water and to avoid unpleasant lumps.

**Kettle:** to boil the water in



## Steps to make matcha using the modern tools at home

1. Bring water to a boil in a kettle, turn it off once it reaches a boil and wait for the bubbles to stop.
2. add either two scoops of matcha using the chashaku or one ½ tsp into the metal sieve over the chawen. Use the back of the chashaku or spoon to gently push the matcha through the sieve to remove any lumps. Take your time as this allows the water to cool, which is important to prevent the matcha from tasting bitter.
3. With the electric whisk, whisk the matcha until the colour is uniform and the matcha stays suspended in the water. Be careful not to whisk so hard that the tea splashes out of the chawen, you can play with holding the chawen at an angle to prevent it from splashing out while mixing.
4. You can drink directly out of the chawan or transfer it into a favorite mug or glass. At this point you can add a sweetener or milk to make a warm latte style drink or pour it over ice with a base of your choice (lemonade, coconut water, soda or milk) to make a cold drink.

## Tea Pairing

More modern treats that you can enjoy with your matcha include cookies, your favorite fruits and another of our favorite sweet snacks. Chocolate can also be an interesting pairing as well. Normally the treats that are paired with matcha are sweet to balance out the bitterness of the match, however chocolate can also be bitter, especially dark chocolate. So if you enjoy more of the bitter flavors dark or milk chocolate and be an interesting pairing. White chocolate is also a common pairing as it has a creamy sweetness that pairs while with the matcha.



Pictured in the photo to the left the matcha what honey and soymilk is paired with:

- ❖ Mandarin orange segments
- ❖ Green tea cookies
- ❖ Coconut macaroons

## Common Errors and How to Solve Them

While many enjoy matcha, others find it bitter, earthy and even fishy at times. While tea selection (check out page 4) can play into this, especially if you find the matcha you are drinking is fishy, often this is due to the seaweed-like taste some matchas can have. Bitterness is caused by a common error. Some bitterness can be expected, but there are ways to reduce the bitterness.

1. Use the right temperature of water
  - a. Green tea in general is very sensitive to being brewed in water that is too hot, and matcha is even more sensitive to temperature. Since it has a high surface area, the tannins that make the tea bitter can release more, and they dissolve more in hot water.
  - i. **Solution:** After boiling water, let the water cool. Wait until the water has stopped bubbling, then start prepping your matcha. By the time you are ready to add the water to the matcha, the water should be around 70-75 °C, which is the ideal brewing temperature for green tea and matcha. **If you still find it bitter**, you can either try cooling the water longer or add a sweetener of your choice. Liquid sweeteners incorporate better in the tea than solid sweeteners like sugar, so sweeteners like flavoured syrups, maple syrup, or honey seem to work best.
  
2. Store your tea properly
  - a. Since matcha is a powder, the increased surface area tends to go stale quickly, so it's recommended to only leave the amount you would use in a month or two at room temperature; the rest should be kept in either the fridge or freezer. If stored in the freezer, it will last longer, and it is less likely to pick up other smells from the fridge.
  - b. Due to the high chlorophyll levels found in matcha, it is very sensitive to light. Being exposed to bright lights can also make it go stale faster, as well as make it lose its bright green colour.
  - c. Humidity can also impact how your matcha tastes. As it is a dried product, if it is exposed to moisture, it can start to mold.
  - i. **Solution:** If you consume it regularly, you can leave about a month's supply in a dark, cool place away from humid areas (not next to the kettle) and store the remaining matcha in the freezer to keep it fresh, OR you can store the matcha you have in your freezer and use it directly from the freezer.

3. You just don't like the taste
  - a. While some people love the bold taste of matcha, it's not everyone's cup of tea. Yet if you still want to drink matcha for its health reasons or are curious about other options, there are a few solutions
    - i. **Solution 1: Try other matcha teas.** Tea can change in flavour depending on how it's grown, processed, and where. So if you haven't found a matcha that you like yet, look for matcha that comes from different tea growing regions or even farms. This does mean that you likely need to buy high-quality matcha, which will also impact taste and price.
    - ii. **Solution 2: Try flavoured matcha teas.** While tea purists would reject this, there are flavoured and presweetened matchas on the market that taste great, with flavours ranging from vanilla to passionfruit to just sweetened. This can sometimes cover up the flavours that you might be looking to avoid, like the bitter, earthy or umami notes.
    - iii. **Solution 3: Mix it into other things.** This is a solution for those who don't like the flavour but want to benefit from the health benefits. While matcha is a strong flavour, it can be covered or hidden by other flavours. So adding a little bit (less than you would likely use to make a matcha and adding it to smoothies with spinach and strong flavours like mango, pineapple and/or berries could do the trick. The spinach can camouflage the green notes of the matcha, and the fruit flavours can add the sweetness that can counter the bitterness.

## Other ways to use Matcha

Matcha's rich flavour has applications in many things other than warm drinks. Matcha can be added to smoothies for flavour and health benefits. Ice drinks are also quite popular, including lemonade, milk or soda-based drinks flavoured with florals like lavender, osmanthus, jasmine or rose. Fruit additions like coconut, strawberry, peach and mango are some of the more popular. More traditional additives include red bean paste, ginger, vanilla and sesame.

Drinks are not the only way to enjoy matcha; there are many desserts, savoury dishes and snacks that can be flavoured with matcha. As seen in the photo to the right, matcha can be used in a savoury dish with buckwheat soba noodles in a ginger matcha broth topped with sesame seeds and umeboshi (Japanese picked plums). While there are some savoury applications, matcha is more popular in sweet dishes like cakes, mochi ( a popular Asian treat made with glutinous rice), cookies and as a flavour for other desserts.



## Conclusion

Matcha has taken the world by storm, and its popularity has led to a variety of techniques and uses for this green powder. It's a long process from the shaded tea table in Japan to your local tea shop, and the process continues once you get home and learn how to make a delicious cup of matcha. While the ritual of the Japanese tea ceremony is interesting, most will prefer one of the at-home methods to make their matcha.

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All uncredited photos were taken by Amber Rose

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