

Q: *What is Pu-erh Tea?*

A: Pu-erh tea is a “post-fermented tea.” According to its official definition, Pu-erh tea must be made: 1) from the broad leaf variety tea leaf indigenous to Yunnan called Yunnan DaYeh; and 2) the tea must be fermented.

Pu-erh tea’s processing involves two phases: the processing of the primary tea (mao cha) and the post-fermentation of the tea. The primary tea is a finished product ready for consumption. It can be consumed immediately or be stored to age via natural fermentation. This type of Pu-erh tea is known as “Raw or Green Pu-erh.” The primary tea can also undergo manually induced fermentation, in which case full fermentation of the tea leaves is achieved within several weeks. This type of Pu-erh tea is known as “Ripe or Cooked Pu-erh.”

Q: *How is Pu-erh tea different from other teas?*

A: Unlike most other teas (white, green, red), which tend to lose their freshness and flavor soon after the time of production, Pu-erh, due to qualities inherent in its broad leaves, undergoes a fermentation process which improves its taste, texture and aroma over time. As such, while most teas should be consumed while they are fresh, Pu-erh tea, like fine wine, is best enjoyed many years later after the tea has been aged.

Another difference between Pu-erh tea from other teas is that most teas can be steeped only 2-3 infusions before losing flavor, Pu-erh tea can be steeped (using a small gaiwan or Yixing pot) at least 10-15 times.

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Q. *What is the best way to brew Pu-erh tea?*

A. The best way to brew Pu-erh tea (especially the high quality Pu-erh and the costly aged Pu-erh) is using the Gongfu brewing method. Using a small Yixing clay teapot or a small three-piece lidded bowl known as Gaiwan, tea is brewed quickly and then dispensed into tiny tea cups. The Gongfu brewing method allows tea drinkers to enjoy the changing flavor of the tea over the course of multiple infusions of the same leaves as they unfurl. Typical brewing time starts at a few seconds to several minutes. Please refer to the section “How to brew a good cup of tea.”

Q. *Why is there a big difference in price among Pu-erh tea?*

A. Like fine wine, Pu-erh tea’s value goes up as it ages. There are costs associated with aging the tea and the inventory of a particular tea will only decrease in time. Accordingly, the price of Pu-erh tea is adjusted at least once year, depending on their popularity and rarity. Generally speaking, the percentage of appreciation goes up most when a tea reaches its 10th year or 20th year.

In addition to the time factor, the difference in pricing of Pu-erh depends on the type of leaves from which the tea is made and the season when it is harvested. Pu-erh made from the spring harvest is the most valued, followed by the fall harvest. Of the spring harvest, the first spring harvest (Ming Qian) calls for the highest price. The most highly sought after Pu-erh teas today are those made from the centuries old arbor trees (also known as ancient tea trees), followed by the young arbor trees. The least expensive teas are those made from the mass produced plantation bushes.

Lastly, as in the case of wine, the producing region is another factor that affects the price of a Pu-erh tea. There are ten famous tea mountains in Yunnan, among which are Yiwu, LaoBanzhang, Jingmai, Nannuo and Yibang. These areas that produce tea with unique flavors and characteristics are valued at higher prices than those of other lesser known regions.

Q: *I have a cake of Pu-erh but how do I go about making tea with it?*

A: In the old days, Pu-erh tea was compressed into cakes for easy transportation. Today, the cake is the perfect medium for storage. To brew tea, some leaves must be chipped from it, either with your hand or with the help of a Pu-erh knife or a pick

by very carefully inserting the blade through the side so as to split the layers of compressed tea. (Please refer to the section “How to use a Pu-erh pick?”) Once the proper amount of leaves is pried loose from the cake, re-wrap the cake in its original wrapper and store it away.

Q: *How should I store a Pu-erh tea cake?*

A: For optimum results, the tea cake should be stored in conditions where: 1) humidity is dry to moderate (around 65%); 2) temperature is moderate; 3) sunlight is minimized; and 4) there is some, but not excessive, ventilation so that oxygen is provided for the fermentation process. Pu-erh tea leaves can quickly absorb odor from its environment. Accordingly, Pu-erh tea should be stored away from objects that have strong odor, such as herbs, spices, moth balls, air fresheners, etc.

Pu-erh tea is best stored in its original packaging, either in its original paper wrapper or in “tungs.” It can also be stored in a clay or ceramic jar but air-tight containers should be avoided.

Q: *Why would Pu-erh tea make a good gift?*

A: Pu-erh's taste improves with age. As a wedding gift, it is an heirloom that can be saved and savored on that special 30th anniversary, even as it, all the while, increases in value. Or it may be given as a birthday present that can be opened and sampled every year to appreciate the flavor changes that it undergoes. Different, yet meaningful, Pu-erh can make a very memorable gift. See our [Samplers](#) and thoughtfully selected [Gift Pack](#) ensembles or call us to create your own custom Gift Pack and Gift Certificate at:
toll free in the USA: 888 968-0788
from outside the USA: 626 968-0788