

## MAKING GONGFU TEA IN AN YIXING UNGLAZED STONEWARE TEAPOT

**GONGFU** (功夫) is a well-known Chinese term often used by speakers of the English language to refer to Chinese martial arts. Its original meaning is somewhat different, referring to any activity requiring training and effort to master the skill. In the context of tea, it refers to care and elegance used prepare and enjoy this beverage. The formal presentation of tea is known as “gongfu tea” makes use of teapots from Yixing, in Jiangsu province. This method of preparing tea originated in 1500s.

**Why use a Yixing teapot?** The central accessory in the art of making fine tea is a teapot from Yixing in Jiangsu Province. These unglazed porous teapots absorb the flavor of tea, making an old teapot more valuable than a new one. Only one kind of tea should be brewed in a teapot. Therefore, if you wish to drink green tea on some occasions and oolong on others you would need two Yixing teapots. Yixing teapots are traditionally used for semi-fermented and fully fermented teas. Teapots should only be cleaned with boiling water before and after use. Soap should never be used as the teapot will absorb the soap and subsequent brewings will taste of soap.

### TYPES OF TEA

**Most** teas fall into one of three basic categories: green (un-oxidized) oolong (semi-oxidized) or red (fully oxidized and known in the West as black tea). Here is a list of some basic types:

English Name	Wade-Giles Romanization	Pinyin Spelling
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#### GREEN:

Dragon's Well	Lung-ching	Longjing
Lion's Peak	Shi-feng	Shifeng
White Cloud	Pai-yun	Baiyun
Jeweled Cloud	Pao-yun	Baoyun
Purple Sprout	Tze-sun	Zisun
Old Man's Eyebrows	Shou-mei	Shoumei
Young Hyson	Chen-mei	Zhenmei
Silver Needle	Yin-chen	Yinchen

#### OOLONG:

Black Dragon	Wu-lung	Wu Long
Bohea	Wu- I	Wuyi
Iron Goddess of Mercy	T'ieh-Kuan-Yin	Tie Guanyin
Iron Arhat	T'ieh Lohan	Tie Luohan
Water Fairy (Iris)	Shui-hsien	Shui Xian
Paper Packed	Pao-ch'ung	Bao zhong
Small Leaves	Hsiao-chung	Xiao zhong
Sparrow Tongue	Ch'iao-she	Qiao She
Dragon Phoenix	Lung-Feng	Long Feng
Dragon Garden Pearl	Lung Yuan Chu	Long Yuan Zhu
Real Dragon Shoots	Cheng Lung-Ya	Zheng Longya
Icy Peak	Tung Ting	Dong Ding
Bright Virtue	Ming-Te	Mingde
Harbor Tea	Kang-Kou	Gangkou

#### RED:

Keemun	Ch'i-Men	Qimen
Fukien Red	Min-Hung	Minhong

#### PU ER Tea

Pu Er	P'u Erh	Pu Er
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Pu Er can be green, oolong or red depending on processing.

#### FLOWER Teas

Also known as Scented Slivers (Hsiang-Pien, Xiang Pian) flowers (such as roses, orchids, cassia, gardenia, lotus, plum and jasmine) are steeped or added to tea leaves to enhance the fragrance and flavor.

Jasmine	Mo-li	Moli
Chrysanthemum	Chu-Hua	Juhua





## BASIC STEPS FOR MAKING GONGFU TEA

In China it is believed that tea is best enjoyed in the company of three or four friends. The steps below outline the procedure.

1. **RINSE** Whenever tea is prepared, the first step is always to rinse all vessels with hot water. This signifies that the ritual of tea making has begun by purifying the pot: cleaning it of dust and residue and making it ready to receive the tea. It also warms the vessels since the hot water is then poured into the serving pitcher and from there into the tasting cups. This is done because at room temperature ceramic tea ware is usually quite cold and unsuited to brewing fine teas whose temperature must be carefully controlled. After rinsing the water should be discarded into the draining tray or a waste water container.
2. **TEA LEAVES** The tea leaves should be prepared in advance, ready to be placed in the pot as soon as it has been warmed. A tea caddy or “tea presentation vessel”, as shown, is recommended for this purpose. Approximately half a pot of tea leaves is good for oolong, one third a pot for green.
3. **AROMA** Before infusion, hot water should be poured over the leaves and quickly poured off. This removes any dust from the leaves and begins to open them up—releasing the tea’s aroma, which should be savored prior to infusion in order to prepare the palate to appreciate the full flavor of the tea.
4. **WATER** 99% of tea is water, so it’s important to give some thought to the water you use for brewing. Tap water should be avoided since its chemical treatment imparts undesirable flavors and odors which interfere with the delicate aromatics of tea. Home filters and other water purification systems can minimize and, in some cases, eliminate these problems. The best water for tea brewing is spring water with a natural mineral content that’s neither too hard nor too soft. Since total dissolved solids or mineral content measured in parts per million varies greatly from water to water, you may want to do your own taste-test of waters available in your area to determine which one has the best flavor, body and compatibility with the tea you drink. An interesting Swiss-based website to consult in this regard is [mineralwaters.org](http://mineralwaters.org). Distilled water is not recommended for tea since water purified of its mineral content produces a flat-tasting infusion.
5. **INFUSION** Infusion, water temperature, and steeping time are just as important as the quality of the water and tea leaves used. For the best infusion fill pot to the top with hot water and cover. Then pour water over the top of the pot, drawing the stream over the air hole until a little water comes out the spout. When this occurs you know the pot is full and heated to the right temperature. For lightly fermented oolongs use 70°-80°C (158°-176°F) water and an infusion time of 3 to 5 minutes. For darker styles, such as Tie Guanyin, between 80° and 90°C (176-194°F) steeping 3 to 5 minutes is recommended. For red (black) tea, water between 85° and 95°C (185°-203°F) and a three-minute infusion is best. For Pu Er tea use water that’s just come to a boil and infuse 3-5 minutes. Green and white teas are generally steeped in covered tea bowls (蓋碗 *gaiwan*) or in larger porcelain /tempered glass teapots.
6. **SERVICE** When the leaves have steeped, pour the tea out into a pitcher or directly into individual tasting cups.
7. **RE-STEeping** One of the benefits of using high quality, whole-leaf teas is that they do not “leech out” like the chopped-up tea found in teabags and, as a result, may be re-steeped—generally two or three times, sometimes more. To re-steep it is usually necessary to increase the infusion time slightly and also to reheat the water, at least to the original infusion temperature, sometimes higher. It is not recommended that tea leaves be left for any length of time between infusions. Temperature and infusion time will vary slightly depending on the quality of tea and quantity of leaves, as well as personal preference. Experiment with various quantities, temperatures, and times to find your own preference.

References: <http://www.imperialtea.com/classroom/GongfuPrep.asp>  
*The Chinese Art of Tea* by John Blofeld, Boston: Shambhala, 1985.