

Let's enjoy
Nihon Cha



日本茶
JAPAN TEA

Nihon Cha culture About Ranji 蘭字

Apart from drinking, the vivid colors of the *Ranji* can be enjoyed by the eyes.



From the end of the Edo period to the Meiji era, multicolored printings with Japanese motifs called *Ranji* were used to decorate the tea chests that were shipped overseas from Japan. These make up an unusual piece of material among documents on tea and other historical materials that still remain to this day. Using the Japanese wood block printing technique from the Edo period (*Ukiyoe*) and choosing motives with the foreign consumers in mind, the design has a high aesthetic and cultural value and has therefore become an object of interest in recent times.

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The history of Nihon Cha

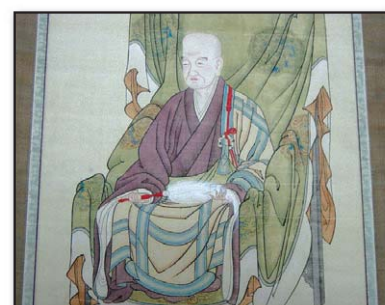
The transition of tea from medicine and antidote to a high quality luxury item

The origin of tea

The birthplace of tea is thought to be China, and originally it was used as a remedy and antidote. The expression “*Ocha wo ippuku*” or “a dose of tea” is said to have its origin in this as well. The father of herbal medicine, *Shen Nong*, who according to the legend is credited for having created the base for today’s Chinese medicine is said to have wandered through fields and mountains in search of beneficial herbs. As he was trying to discern whether different types of herbs and leaves were good to consume for humans or not, he got poisoned as many as 72 times a day but when that happened, he always used tea leaves as an antidote. This story is of great importance for the understanding of the world of tea.



Shen Nong
Courtesy of the Sankogan Kusuri Museum



Yosai Zenji
Courtesy of Kenninji



Sen no Rikyū
Courtesy of Sakai City Museum

The world history of tea

Tea arrived in Europe in the 16th century during the Age of Discovery. The Portuguese who made it to Canton are said to have been the first Westerners to taste tea. In the 17th century the Dutch established hegemony over the trade in Asia and through the Dutch the export of tea to Great Britain started. During the following centuries, tea gradually spread to all corners of the world. According to statistics from 2014 the production of tea was approximately 5,170,000t, among which *Green tea* accounted for 1,670,000t and *Black tea* for an estimated 3,500,000t.

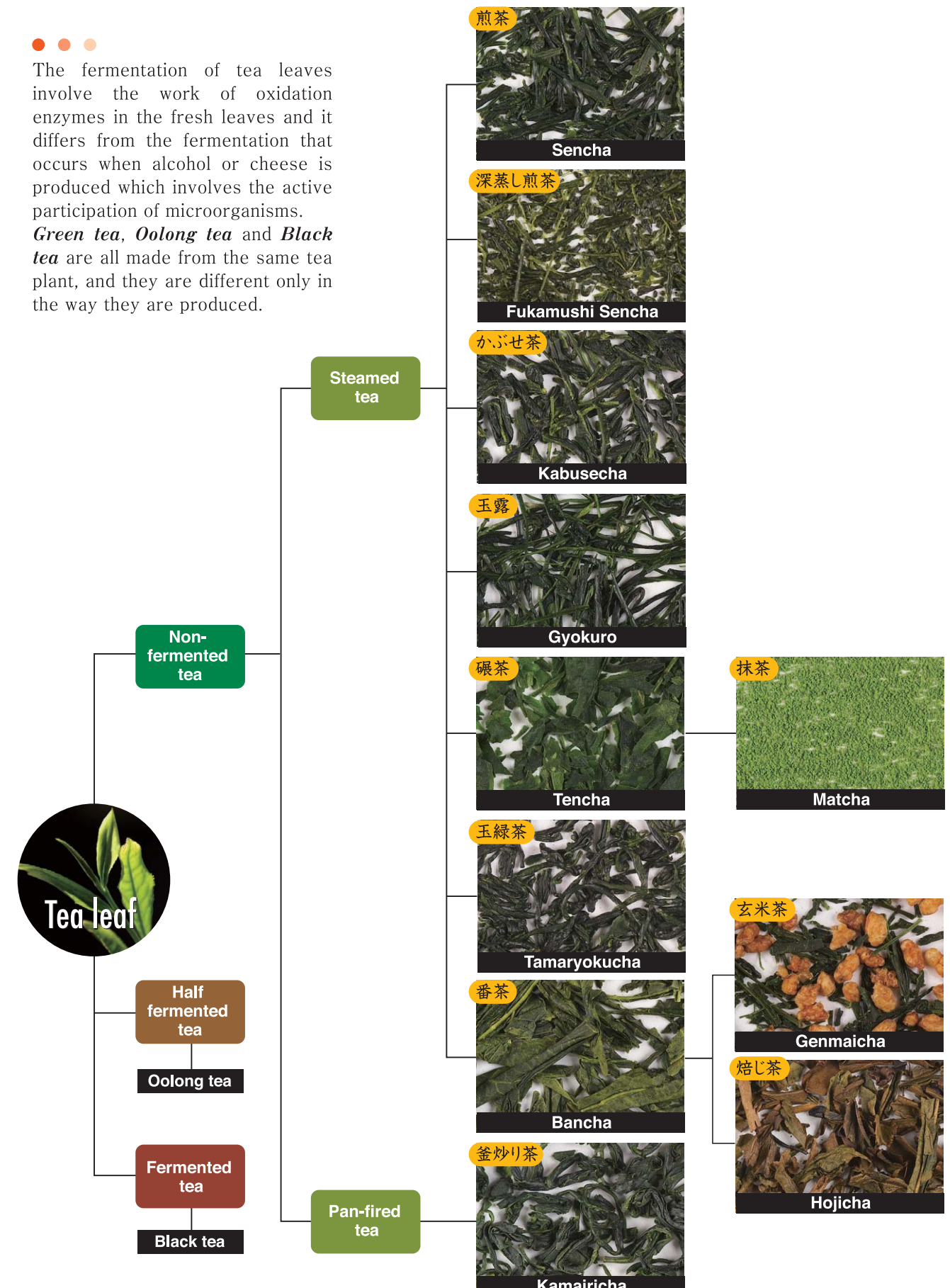
The history of tea in Japan

The oldest reliable record of tea drinking in Japan can be found in the “*Nihon Kōki*” (one of the six classical Japanese history texts). One passage describes how the Buddhist monk *Eichuu* offers tea to the Saga emperor on the 22nd of April 815. At the time, tea was a very rare delicacy. It then got more widely spread during the Kamakura period (1185-1333 CE) when *Yosai*, a Buddhist monk also known for having started the Rinzai Sect, brought back tea to Japan from Sung dynasty China. The tea drunk at the time was close in resemblance to today’s *Matcha*. *Sencha* came into being during the Edo period and within time it spread to the common people as well.

Types of Nihon Cha

In tea production, what is usually called fermentation is actually oxidation. Processing is different but it is made from one and the same tea plant.

The fermentation of tea leaves involve the work of oxidation enzymes in the fresh leaves and it differs from the fermentation that occurs when alcohol or cheese is produced which involves the active participation of microorganisms. *Green tea*, *Oolong tea* and *Black tea* are all made from the same tea plant, and they are different only in the way they are produced.



The production processes of Nihon Cha

The difference in taste and flavor of tea depends on whether the tea has undergone an oxidation process or not during production.



The oxidation enzymes cause the oxidation of **catechin** that is contained in the tea leaves. The oxidation of **catechin** is usually referred to as fermentation and it is this process that gives **Black tea** its reddish color and it is also during this stage that the flower like aroma of **Oolong tea** is born.

The difference between **Nihon Cha** on one hand and **Black tea** and **Oolong tea** on the other is that the oxidase (oxidation enzyme) is not allowed to function in the case of **Nihon Cha**.

The manufacturing processes of Nihon Cha

1. Tea leaves are picked. [Plucking]
2. The fresh leaves are steamed and thereby the oxidase is deactivated. [Steaming]
3. The steamed leaves are exposed to hot air while at the same time rolled and dried. [Primary drying]
4. The tea is neatly rolled under pressure. [Tea rolling]
(※This is the only stage where heat is not added)
5. While exposed to warm air, the tea is rolled in order to arrange the shape of the leaves. [Secondary drying]
6. The shape of the leaves are then further arranged. [Final rolling]
7. The tea leaves are then thoroughly dried, and the production of "Aracha" (crude tea) is completed. [Tea drying]
8. The tea then goes through a finishing process where the Aracha is sifted and cut in order to sort it according to shape and size. [Refining]
9. The tea is then finally packed into sacks or cases. [Packing]



The main tea producing regions in Japan

The largest tea producing region in Japan is Shizuoka Prefecture, which is also famous for Mount Fuji. About 40% of all **Nihon Cha** is produced in Shizuoka.

The second largest producer is Kagoshima Prefecture, followed by Mie Prefecture coming in as third. Except for these regions, tea is also produced in Kyoto Prefecture and the nearby regions and on the southern island of Kyushu.



Nihon Cha can be recommended for many different occasions

Many ways to enjoy **Nihon Cha** in different moods and situations.



As a part of the daily life in Japan there are many occasions when tea is drunk. Adjusting the brewing technique and the way of enjoying tea to situation or one's mood makes tea drinking more enjoyable.

For relaxing

Tea contains a lot of **theanine**, and teas with an accentuated sweetness such as high quality **Sencha** and **Gyokuro** is steeped in about 70°C warm water.

For physical work or workout

High quality **Sencha** contains a lot of **caffeine** which acts as a muscle stimulant. Steep **Sencha** in 90°C water and drink 20-30 minutes before work out or physical work. Thereafter, it should be drunk approximately every 30 minutes, with the purpose of rehydrating at the same time.

Before sleep, during pregnancy or for infants

Since **caffeine** is kept in the body for a long time in the case of pregnant women and infants, it is advisable to use about half the amount of leaves, or to use a tea with a low **caffeine** content such as **Genmaicha** or low **caffeine** tea.

Against colds and influenza

To drink or gargle green tea has a great effect when it comes to preventing influenza. Due to the effects of **catechins**, infections can be prevented regardless of the type of influenza.



At work or in between meetings

The **caffeine** in green tea helps us to keep alert and awake. High quality **Sencha** prepared with hot water is recommended for this purpose.

After intake of high calorie or oily foods

To refresh the palate, **Hojicha** or **Bancha** is suitable. In order to lower the cholesterol levels, green tea with high **catechin** content should be prepared with hot water, strongly brewed and regularly consumed for the best effect.

Curing intoxication

In order to increase the stimulant effect of **caffeine**, high quality **Sencha** should be steeped in hot water. **Caffeine** also acts as a diuretic and thereby helps to speed up the discharge of alcohol from the body. Also, by mixing alcohol with tea, **catechins** help to lower the concentration of alcohol in the blood and thereby prevent hangovers.

Rehydrating after sweating heavily

For rehydrating, teas that can be drunk in great quantities such as chilled **Hojicha** or **Bancha** are recommended.

For an empty stomach

Tea rich in **caffeine** and **catechin** may be tough for the stomach and therefore weakly brewed teas are recommended in these cases.

When studying for exams

Since it helps to keep away drowsiness, tea with high **caffeine** content such as high quality **Sencha** and **Gyokuro** should be steeped in water with a high temperature.

The way to prepare Nihon Cha (Sencha)

There are different ways of preparing and enjoying the respective kinds of teas.

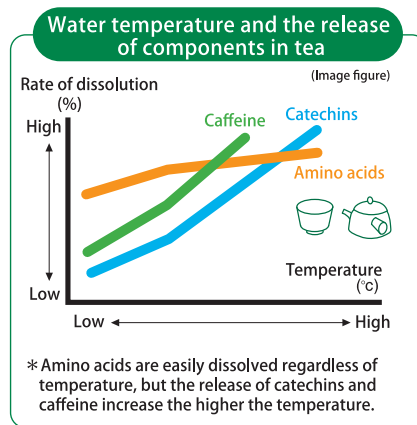
The principles of preparing Nihon Cha

One important aspect of Japanese tea is that “*Umami*” (savoriness or richness) and the amino acids that give rise to this nuance is strongly emphasized.

Because of that, the following two points are important when preparing *Gyokuro* or high quality *Sencha*.

- 1 To extract the “*Umami*” components (amino acids)
- 2 To restrict the release of astringent and bitter substances such as catechin (tannin) and caffeine

The amino acids will dissolve regardless of the temperature of the water but **tannin** and **caffeine** dissolves easier the hotter the water. High quality tea should therefore be prepared with a lower temperature. However, once you grasp this basic principle, you can adjust your tea according to your own preferences.



Why is tea bitter?

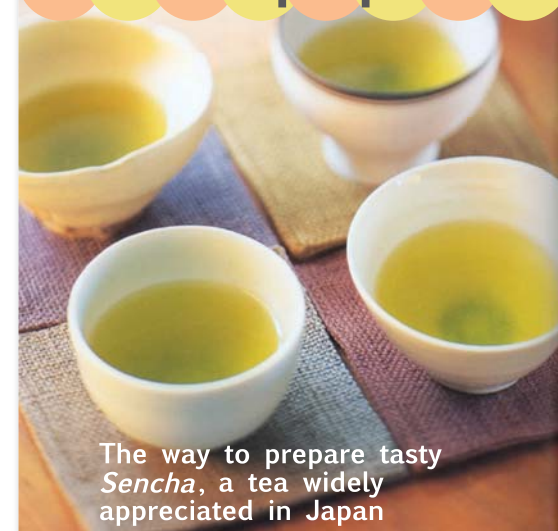
Have you ever felt that *Nihon Cha* is bitter or astringent and therefore hard to appreciate? *Nihon Cha* contains **catechins**, a group of polyphenols that give tea a bitter and astringent taste.

There is also **caffeine**, which is a bitter substance and all these cause the tea to appear bitter and astringent.

Although **catechin** has these properties, it is also noted for its preventive effects on lifestyle related diseases and for numerous other health benefits.

As for **caffeine**, it helps us to keep awake and alert.

How to prepare tasty Nihon Cha



- 1 Pour thoroughly boiled water into the tea cups.
* Hot water: 120ml per person
- 2 Put the tea leaves in the tea pot.
* one tea spoon filled to the brim (roughly 3g) for every person.
* For three persons: About 9-10 g of tea leaves
- 3 Pour the water that has fallen down in temperature to between 70°C to 80°C into the tea pot.
- 4 After pouring the hot water into the tea pot, wait for 1 to 2 minutes before pouring it into the cups.
* From the second brewing, it is fine with 30 seconds steeping time.
- 5 Pour a little at a time in the order 1→2→3 and then keep on pouring a little by little returning in the order 3→2→1. Repeat this until all of the liquid is poured into the cups.
* This is called “*Mawashitsugi*” in Japanese.
* By pouring the tea in this way, all the cups will be of equal strength and flavor.

Enjoying Umami

Gyokuro

Temperature : 50°C to 60°C
Steeping time : 2 minutes
Hot water : 20ml per person
Tea leaves : 3g per person

- 1 Pour the hot water into the “*Yuzamashi*” (water cooler).
* If you do not have a “*Yuzamashi*” you can use any vessel that can handle hot liquids.
- 2 Pour the cooled down water from step 1 into the tea pot.
- 3 Pour the water into the tea cups and fill them to about 8/10.
* For *Gyokuro*, very small tea cups are used.
- 4 Put the *Gyokuro* leaves into in the tea pot.
- 5 Wait for a short while and then pour the water from the cups into the tea pot.
- 6 After two minutes, pour the tea a little by little according to the “*Mawashitsugi*” technique described in “How to prepare tasty *Nihon Cha*” above.
- 7 Please try and eat the very leaves after enjoying several brewings.
* From the second brewing, it is fine with 30 seconds steeping time.

Enjoying the aroma

Bancha and Hojicha

Temperature: Boiling water
Hot water : 150ml per person

* Use a large amount of tea leaves.
About 15g for 5 persons is usually the standard.

- 1 Put the tea leaves in the tea pot.
- 2 Pour boiling hot water into the tea pot, wait for 30 seconds and then pour it into the cups.

How can the bitterness be softened?

One property of bitter and astringent substances in *Nihon Cha* like **caffeine** and **catechin** is that they dissolve easier the hotter the water.

Tea becomes bitter and astringent when catechin is dissolved to a large extent. For those who dislike bitter and astringent tea, *Nihon Cha* can be steeped in water with a lower temperature to make it tastier.

How to enjoy Matcha

The necessary tools for *Matcha* and how to use them.



What is Matcha?

Matcha is made from tea leaves grown in the shade. The fresh leaves are steamed and then dried without rolling. The result is called *Tencha*. *Tencha* is then grinded in a stone mill to a fine 1~20µm powder to make *Matcha*.



Tencha



High grade Matcha



Low grade Matcha



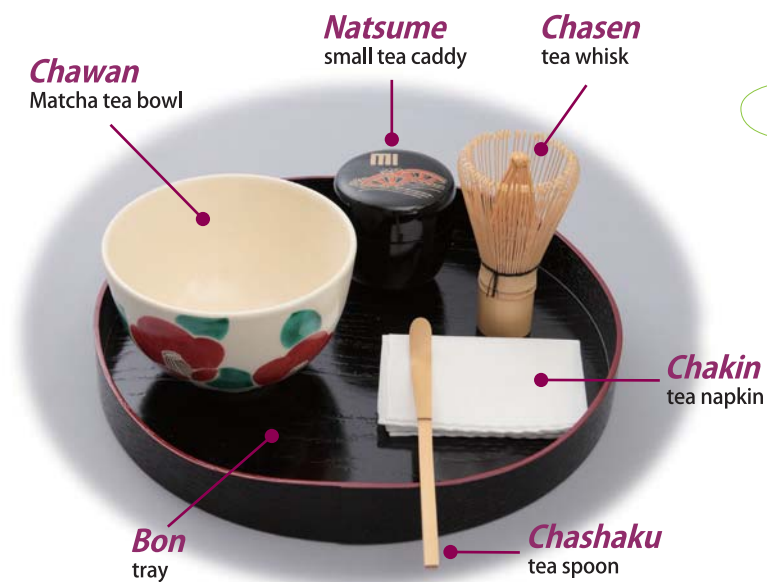
Shaded tea garden

The tea plants are covered with reed screens and the like, thereby preventing exposure to direct sunlight. *Gyokuro*, *Tencha* (the base for *Matcha*) and *Kabusecha* are made by leaves from shaded tea gardens.

Sweets made with Matcha



Utensils used to enjoy Matcha



Matcha Rollcake



Matcha Baumkuchen



Matcha Cheesecake



Matcha Chocolate



Matcha Nuts



Matcha pudding



Matcha Latte

Preparation

◆ How to prepare the tea whisk *Chasen*

Pour hot water into the tea bowl and soak the tea whisk. This smoothens and softens the tea whisk and warms up the tea bowl at the same time.



◆ How to sift *Matcha*

If the *Matcha* is sifted, it is easier to whisk it into a frothy liquid without lumps.



How to whisk Matcha

1 Measure 1.5~2g of *Matcha* with a *Chashaku* (Japanese tea spoon) and put it into the tea bowl. Measure roughly 2 spoonfuls with the *Chashaku*.



2 Then pour 5~10ml of hot water into the bowl. Make sure to pour the water on the side and not straight over the *Matcha*. Pouring the water in this way helps to cool down the water.



3 Use the tea whisk to mix the *Matcha* carefully. This makes the *Matcha* soft and prevents the formation of lumps.



4 Pour 50~60ml of hot water (95°C) into the bowl.



5 Stir the tea silently but swiftly back and forth with the tea whisk to mix the tea. Make sure that the tea whisk does not touch the bottom of the bowl in this process.



6 When the *Matcha* has turned into a frothy liquid with small bubbles, lift the tea whisk and the preparation of *Matcha* is finished.



Nihon Cha and health

Tea is gentle both to the body and the mind. Tasty, healthy and relaxing.



In recent years tea has become increasingly highlighted all over the world as a health beverage since its disease preventing and health promoting effects have been widely reported.

There are many substances in tea that are good for the body and below we will introduce a few of them.

Catechins

- Have antioxidant and antimutagenic effects.
- Prevent starch from being metabolised, restricts the absorption of glucose, keeps the blood pressure low and thereby help to prevent obesity.
- Have a sterilizing effect on bacteria that causes food poisoning such as O-157 or cholera bacteria. It also kills harmful bacteria in the intestines and increases the good bacteria such as Lactobacillus Bifidus.
- Lower the level of bad cholesterol (LDL).
- Rinsing one's mouth with tea after meals kills harmful bacteria and thus prevents cavity.
- The *Benifuki* cultivar contains a lot of methylated catechin which is effective against allergy symptoms for pollen.

Caffeine

- Relieves fatigue, has an awakening effect and acts as a diuretic.
- Helps to burn fat, and reduces the intoxication effect from over consumption of alcohol.
- Promotes blood circulation.

Theanine

- Eases the effects of caffeine.
- Affects the brain cells and gives a relaxing and healing effect.

Vitamin C

- Acts as an antioxidant, improves immunity, relieves fatigue, prevents colds and makes the skin beautiful.
- Since the catechin in tea protects Vitamin C it becomes strong against heat, and 5 cups of green tea contain as much as 100g of lemon juice (50mg Vitamin C).

Fluoride

- Strengthens the tooth enamel and prevents cavities.

Minerals

- Minerals are important for metabolic efficiency.
- Apart from potassium, which eases the effects of excess salt consumption, tea also contains calcium, magnesium, iron and other minerals.

Saponin

- Has antidiabetic effects, relieves fatigue, increases vitality, prevents blood clot formation and has many other positive effects.

Water-insoluble components

- β -carotene, Vitamin E, Chlorophyll, protein, dietary fiber etc.
- By eating the leaves of high quality *Sencha*, or by consuming *Matcha* or powdered tea one is able to completely absorb all components found in tea.



One cup of tea (120ml) contains about 70 to 120 mg of catechin.

One cup of tea contains about 30 to 50mg of caffeine.

Theanine is a substance unique to tea. High quality *Sencha*, *Gyokuro* and *Kabusecha* are teas with a high content.

By drinking one cup of green tea, one can absorb 10mg of Vitamin C.

Tea leaves have a high content of fluoride.

During hot summers, lack of potassium sometimes results in summer fatigue.

One special feature of saponin is that it yields a frothy liquid when mixed with water.

Used tea leaves can be said to be a treasure box of water-insoluble components.

Nihon Cha and lifestyle

Nihon Cha is not only a healthy and delicious beverage, but it is also deeply rooted in the daily life of the Japanese.



Different uses of tea

Aroma from roasted tea or tea incense can be used to deodorise a room.



Used leaves that are still moist can be put in gauze fabric and used to wipe iron pots and pans in order to prevent rust.



Used Bancha leaves can be put inside a pillow to make a tea pillow.

Tea can be used as a bath powder, to sterilise one's hands, and as a fertiliser.



By soaking fresh fish in chilled tea, one can get rid of the fishy smell.



Storage conditions for Nihon Cha

Properties of tea

- ◆ Deteriorates easily due to exposure to oxygen, moist, high temperature and light.
- ◆ Has a tendency to absorb the smell of other things.

Storage condition

- ◆ Store tea in an airtight container that does not allow sunlight or air to get through.
- ◆ Keep your tea in an airtight container in the refrigerator or another cool, dark place.

[Important points when refrigerating tea]

- Put the tea somewhere in the fridge where the temperature is not likely to rise and fall too much as a consequence of opening and closing the door.
- When taking the tea out of the refrigerator, wait until it has returned to room temperature before opening the package.

[The way to store tea for a long period]

The most likely reason for tea deteriorating is exposure to oxygen. Therefore it is important to keep the contact with air at an absolute minimum.

Points!!

- Keep leaves for 10 days consumption in a separate tea caddy and store the rest of the tea in an airtight container in the refrigerator.
- To avoid odor from other food stuffs to be absorbed by the tea, use tape to seal the package when storing tea for a long time in the refrigerator. It is also advisable to put the package in a plastic bag for extra protection.

[About the Chazutsu]

In Japan, since old times tea has been stored in a *Chazutsu*, or tea caddy, at home. A *Chazutsu* is a cylinder shaped can that is airtight to a high degree, and usually made of wood, tin or lacquerware. It is good for storing not only *Nihon Cha*, but also *Black tea* and coffee beans. It is often wrapped in decorative Japanese paper (Washi) and can therefore be used as part of interior design as well.



If the tea has become moist, use it to make Hojicha, roasted tea

By roasting tea that has become damp one can avoid the waste of tea and still enjoy it in a tasty way.

Recipe!!

- Place a sheet of parchment paper in a skillet, put the leaves on top and roast them over intense heat until the aroma starts to rise.



Make sure that the leaves are not burned by always keeping an eye on the heat and roast the leaves until they have all turned dark brown.