

## Tea Pots, Brewing Methods & Teas

I like coffee, but I love teas. In this post, I'm going to share some of my knowledge about teas with a comparison between tea brewing methods using a double-kettle Turkish tea pot versus one type of East Asian teapot, along with some basic information about tools and teas. I'm no expert at all, but I do have a decent basic understanding.

### The Turkish Teapot, Brewing & Teas

In Turkish culture, tea is an integral part of the culture and hospitality. To not offer tea to a guest is an insult, without exception. The Turks are also known for their coffees, which are also very popular in Turkey.

The picture below shows my caydanlik (pronounced: Chi-dan-luk; Chi as in "China"; Cay = tea in Turkish), or double-kettle teapot. This modern, porcelain enamel pot is a Turkish-made Simay brand, typical in many Turkish households, and costs about \$40 USD. There are also highly ornamental, handmade copper or nickel caydanliks that are tin-lined and can cost from \$50 to hundreds of dollars, depending on the quality of the metals and the artistic quality of the engravings.

**Note:** The Caydanlik is not to be confused with the Samovar, which is another typically metal type of teapot common in Russia, many Eastern European countries and some Middle Eastern countries.



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### Brewing with the Turkish Teapot

The most common way to correctly brew with a caydanlik is as follows:

1. Fill the large, bottom pot with water.
2. Fill the smaller, top pot with your dry tea leaves or grinds.

3. Stack the pots, and then place on a burner and boil the water, which you've put in the bottom pot. As the water comes to a boil, the heat generated will release the essential oils of the dry tea in the smaller pot.
4. Once the water boils, reduce the flame as low as possible, remove the top pot and fill it with the hot water from the bottom pot. The amount of water you put in the smaller pot depends on the amount of tea leaves you used. Do NOT stir the tea leaves.
5. Restack the pots, place back on the low flame and allow the tea to steep for at least 15 minutes, though I recommend at least 30 minutes of initial steeping.

**Note:** Before I describe how to serve the tea, notice that you pour boiling water on to the tea leaves. This is a big rule-breaker in general, but not in this context.

The tea in the small, top pot becomes very concentrated. The stacked design of this pot lets you to keep the tea ready on the stove all day for any visitors.

### Serving Tea with the Turkish Teapot

Tea brewed in a caydanlik is served very hot, and there's a process, or more of a ritual, involved. In the preceding picture, notice the tulip-shaped glass and the silver strainer, both of which are used in the tea serving process. Here's how it's done:

1. First, you place the tea strainer on top of the drinking glass.
2. Next, you pour some of the very concentrated tea from the small pot into the glass, anywhere from 1/4 to more than half full. Half full is seriously strong.
3. Then, you remove the strainer and fill the rest of the glass with hot water from the larger pot.
4. You provide sugar or honey to the guest and allow them to use it as they like.

**Note:** Serve with a good tea cookie.

### Some Info. On Turkish Teas and Blends

The picture below shows some of my favorite teas that I use in my caydanlik. From right to left: A nice Earl Grey, a very high quality Turkish Black Tea and another good Black Tea produced in Sri Lanka. I recommend storing your teas at room temperature in a sealed container. The last section in this post provides some details on storing teas.



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Turks typically use a single black tea; however, there are also endless blends using all kinds of combinations, including herbs, florals and fruits.

Here is my favorite, go-to blend that I drink most often. It is 3 parts of the Caykur black, 1 part Earl Grey and a little of some good quality dried sage. The picture is not an accurate representation of my measurements, just an illustration of the ingredients.



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#### Where to Buy a Turkish Teapot & Teas

The best place to purchase a caydanlik is at your local Middle Eastern market as I did, if there is one nearby. If not, there are many options online. eBay has a very good selection. I recommend staying away from Chinese-made ones because they can be toxic. The Simay brand is safe and well made. There are also modern, single layer stainless steel ones that are nice, though I recommend porcelain-enamel because it retains heat the best.

You'll usually find a good variety of teas and strainers at any Middle Eastern market. But you can also buy them online. The strainer shown in the picture is actually sterling silver plated from around 1900-1910, American Arts & Crafts. I bought it for \$12 on eBay. It was badly tarnished but I just took some time to clean it up. It turned out to be great find, quite rare and worth much more than \$12. You can also find a simple wire mesh strainer for \$4-10. Rare, collectible strainers can be worth thousands of dollars.

Don't be shy about going to a Middle Eastern market and asking the folks there about their teas. The Middle Eastern people are very hospitable and will be more than happy to help you.

**Tip:** By the way, Middle Eastern stores are also a great source for dry spices and other amazing ingredients. I actually buy my lamb and chicken at a Halal store because the quality is incredible - all organic, fresh meats at much better prices than other places.

### **The East Asian Teapot, Brewing & Teas**

Unlike the Turkish teapot and teas, Asian teapots and teas are a different animal altogether. Asian teas and tea culture is complex and wide-ranging, and I know only the very basics. Here's some of what I know to make my comparison.

The picture below shows my cast-iron, enamel lined teapot, or what is known as a Tetsubin teapot. It is a Japanese, handmade pot with a maker's mark of fairly high quality, though not on the very high end. I think I paid between \$100 and \$150 for it. I believe the Tetsubin pot has been around since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century. You can get Chinese Tetsubin knock-offs, but I don't recommend buying one if only for safety issues. That's not to say the Chinese don't know how to make incredible teapots, since it is the Chinese who are arguably the first culture to really use and develop teas and tea culture. There are also more affordable porcelain pots, steel, clay, glass etc.. Clay, cast-iron and porcelain are my favorites. The base on which the pot sits can hold a votive candle, which does a great job of keeping the tea quite hot for hours after it is brewed.



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### Brewing with the Tetsubin Teapot

The general process for brewing tea in this pot is quite simple.

1. Put your dried tea leaves in the mesh basket and place the basket in the pot.
2. Heat your water to the correct temperature based on the tea you've selected using a stovetop kettle or a fancy, temperature-controlled, electric hot water heater. I use a stovetop kettle.
3. Once the water is heated, simply pour it into the teapot.
4. Allow the tea to steep a few minutes, but not too long and **DO NOT** stir the tea leaves. Both over-steeping and agitating the tea can cause the tea to taste bitter and significantly alter the taste.
5. Remove the mesh basket, put on the top and serve.
6. When you're done serving, place the pot on a warmer, such as the one I have with a votive candle.

### Serving Tea With the Tetsubin Teapot

Regarding serving the tea, there are many different, formal ways and rituals to serve tea in East Asian cultures. I'm not very educated on all the different serving methods and it's not really practical information for me here in America on a daily basis, so I just pour and allow guests to sweeten their tea with honey or sugar, as they like.

## Buying Asian Teas and Getting the Most From Them

I mostly drink various Oolong teas, Green teas and some fruit blends. Those are my favorites, but there are various blacks, whites, reds, herbals, floral blends, and on and on.

I think the most important thing to understand is the water temperature and steeping time required for each type of tea. Green teas, for example, require a lower water temperature (about 175 F) and should be steeped only 1-2 minutes, while Oolong should be brewed with water that is about 195 F and steeped for 3-5 minutes. Frankly, I eyeball all of this. For instance, for green teas I wait until the water heats to before a simmer and is just steaming a little. For Oolong, I let the water get to a very low simmer.

Here are some teas types and their recommended steeping temperatures and steeping times based on an 8 oz. cup:

Tea Type	Quantity of Dry Tea	Water Temperature	Steeping Time
Green	1 tsp.	175 F	1-2 minutes
White	1.5 tsp.	175 F	4-5 minutes
White, Flavored	1.5 tsp.	175 F	1-2 minutes
Black	1 tsp.	195 F	3-4 minutes
Oolong	1 tsp.	195 F	3-5 minutes
Rooibos	1.5 tsp.	208 F	5-6 minutes
Mate	1.5 tsp.	208 F	5-6 minutes
Herbal	1.5 tsp.	208 F	5-6 minutes

**Very Important:** Don't be tempted to steep the tea for longer than recommended; it does make a big difference. You may look at the color and think it needs more steeping. Brewing a green tea just one minute longer than needed can make the tea go from great to horrible. Another common mistake is using more dry tea than needed. Those tightly rolled Oolong leaves are deceiving and expand like crazy. Good teas can be expensive, so no need to waste them.

**Tip:** You can reuse the tea leaves in the basket at least once with most teas.

What is great about the Tetsubin cast iron teapot and also a clay teapot is that they season with use, somewhat akin to a cast iron pan. Don't wash them out, but just wipe the inside with a towel and leave it at that. The flavors build up nicely over time.

As far as buying teas and teapots, I go to Chinatown in Chicago where I live, but I also go to a few boutique stores in my local area and sometimes a franchise called Teavana at a local mall.

## Storing Teas

You should store your teas in a solid, airtight container at room temperature. Light should not be able to penetrate the tea leaves, so avoid using glass containers. Do not place containers near anything that emits heat. Teas tend to lose their flavor when exposed to light, heat, cold and humid conditions.

Admittedly, I don't always follow these guidelines. I often store my Turkish black teas in the refrigerator in tins and sealed paper bags, which in theory can degrade the quality of your teas because of the potential damage due to humidity and cold. I use my Turkish teas frequently and go through them quickly so I've never noticed any damage or change in flavor. However, if you want to avoid any risk, especially with delicate teas, I recommend storing your teas at room temperature.

**All of this can be affordable.** For about \$40-\$50, you can buy an inexpensive porcelain pot, cups and a few teas with which to try out. And don't be afraid to experiment with making your own blends.

This post merely scratches the surface. There are also Chinese, Great Britain, West Asian, Eastern European teas and tea practices, etc.

I hope this information was helpful for those who might be interested in teas.