The Complete Beginners Guide
To Making Chinese Tea

by Daniel Lui

with L. Eric Dahlberg

This guide will introduce you to the practice of "Gong Fu Cha", - "Tea With Great Skill". Unlike wine drinkers who learn about vines and vintages, the tea-maker must make what they drink, which requires not just knowledge but skill in selecting and using their tools. With the information presented in this guide, one can progress very quickly to an advanced stage of tea-making in this traditional and ancient art. About the only subject that is not covered here is grading tea and deciding which tea to drink, which can be found in many books, websites and at www.realchinatea.com

© 2009 Tat Fat (Daniel) Lui

All rights Reserved. This article may not be reproduced in any manner in whole or in part without written permission of the author.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHY ALL THE FUSS FOR A CUP OF TEA? ........................................................................................................... 3
  Quality of the Tea ............................................................................................................................................... 4
  How Much Tea Do I Use? ................................................................................................................................. 4
  Water Temperatures ........................................................................................................................................ 7
  Brewing Times ................................................................................................................................................ 8
  Quality and Type of Teapot ............................................................................................................................... 10

HOW TO MAKE GONG FU CHA ...................................................................................................................... 11
  Step One – Warm The Teapot, Sterilize The Teacups And Strainer .............................................................. 12
  Step Two – Rinse The Tea Leaves ................................................................................................................... 12
  Step Three – First Brew .................................................................................................................................. 12
  Step Four – Additional Brews .......................................................................................................................... 12
  Step Five – Finishing Up .................................................................................................................................. 13

ADVANCED TECHNIQUES ................................................................................................................................... 13
  Selecting A Clay Teapot .................................................................................................................................... 13
  Advanced Brewing Technique .......................................................................................................................... 15
  The Quality Of Water ....................................................................................................................................... 15
  Seasoning A New Teapot .................................................................................................................................. 16
  Storing Tea ......................................................................................................................................................... 17

MORE INFORMATION .......................................................................................................................................... 17

CHARTS

Teapot Sizes for Number of People Served ........................................................................................................ 5
Tea Type By Size of Tea Leaves ........................................................................................................................... 6
Number of Chinese Tea-Scoops To Use Based on Size of Tea Leaves and Size of Teapot ............................... 6
Water Temperatures ............................................................................................................................................. 7
Brewing Times ..................................................................................................................................................... 8
Worksheet – All Charts ...................................................................................................................................... 9
Shapes of Teapots For Specific Types of Teas .................................................................................................... 14
WHY ALL THE FUSS FOR A CUP OF TEA?

When I first moved to North America from Hong Kong and local friends would invite me to their homes for tea, I would watch them bring out their large big teapot, throw in some tea leaves, add boiling water and let the leaves steep until the brew was good and strong. When the tea got too strong, they would simply add more water and repeat the process until the leaves had no more flavour. They were surprised to learn that this is how most Chinese drink tea as well!

While most Chinese are aware of Gong Fu Cha as part of their cultural history, few actually know how it is done. The modern Gong Fu style of making tea is essentially about controlling all the variables of tea-making with a high degree of precision and consistency. In this way it is possible to get the maximum amount of flavour consistently over the maximum number of brews that a tea can make. It is not a ceremony as in the well known Japanese Cha No Yu tradition with all its symbolism, but a procedure of practical steps where everything involved has a functional purpose to make a tea taste as good as it can.

Gong Fu Cha is as much about escaping the pressures of life for a few moments as it is about enjoying every drop of tea. The first thing a Westerner will notice is the teacups are very small. This approach to tea-making with such attention to detail and savouring every drop of tea is different from western notions of tea-making, but as an art that has been perfected over many hundreds of years, the result is a relaxing and enjoyable environment alone or with friends and tea that is like nothing you’ve ever tasted before. With many Chinese tea shops now opening and access to the internet, tea knowledge, good quality tea and tea accessories are more widely available than ever before, so anyone from anywhere can learn this ancient skill with just a little practice!

So let’s jump right in. At the basic level, there are 5 variables involved:

- Quality Of The Tea
- How Much Tea Do I Use?
- Temperature Of The Water
- Brewing Times
- The Quality and Type Of Teapot

At the advanced level, add:

- Selecting a Teapot
- Advanced Brewing Technique
- Quality of Water
- Seasoning a New Teapot
- Storing Tea
Quality of the Tea

As the economy of China has grown, so has its tea industry. In the late 1990’s there were relatively few tea manufacturers. Ten years later there are thousands! Unfortunately the number of tea growers has not increased at the same rate, so there is a lot of second rate product on the market (that comes in very beautiful and expensive packaging). The fact is that tea is marketed and retailed much like any other product and most people working in Chinese tea shops have little training about what makes a high grade tea. They simply have, like any other retail store, products that range from cheap to expensive. From a store’s perspective, the most expensive tea is “good tea”.

How to recognize the grade of teas is beyond the scope of this guide but I can say that a little foreknowledge about what you are buying will go a long way. As a beginner, if you keep detailed written notes and buy as many different teas as you can afford from as many different sources as possible, in the long run you will be far better off buying the most expensive tea you can afford from the most knowledgeable person you can find, be it from a tea shop or an online store. The beginner must accept that buying and trying teas is the cost of getting an education.

There are 2 reasons for selecting the best grade of tea you can find. It tastes better and lasts longer, making it more cost-effective in the long run. High grade tea will last 6 – 10 brews with consistent flavour depending on how strong you like your tea. Poor quality tea may taste good on the first or second brew but after that there is little taste left, so you just end up using more tea. The better tea shops will always make a tea for you before you buy. Make sure to taste the fourth or fifth brew to really see what you are getting and pay attention to how it is being made. You can even ask them to follow the same brew times you use. Try to get a sample or buy the smallest quantity you can for a new tea.

How Much Tea Do I Use?

This was the part that gives beginners the most difficulty. The first step in making Gong Fu style tea is to select the right size teapot to suit the number of people you will be making tea for most of the time. Teapots come in a variety of sizes but for the most part, the sizes are standardized. Here is a handy way to refer to them:
Teapot Sizes for Number of People Served

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Teapot</th>
<th>Volume (ml / fl oz) (approximate)</th>
<th>Number of People Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 size</td>
<td>70 / 2.4</td>
<td>1 - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>100 / 3.4</td>
<td>2 - 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>175 / 6.0</td>
<td>3 - 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 4</td>
<td>225 / 7.6</td>
<td>4 - 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shopping for teapots can be confusing and the numbers correspond quite well to the number of people being served. If you usually drink tea alone or with one other person, the #2 size for 2 persons would be a good start. If a few more people come over for tea, you can simply make more brews. If you have a favourite tea that you serve often to many guests, consider getting a larger teapot for that tea.

Now that you have determined the size of teapot you need, you have also established the amount of water you will be using to make tea. Now it’s time to introduce you to the Chinese “tea-scoop”*. This unusually shaped traditional wooden spoon is found in Chinese tea shops and there are two sizes; small and large. In this guide, I am referring the larger size. Using the scoop at the beginning of your training gives you a standard for keeping track of how much tea to use for each tea. *(One level Chinese “tea-scoop” is equivalent to approximately one level western type tablespoon in case you can’t find the real thing).*

The following guide shows you the sizes of tea leaves of the most popular types of tea. Once you have identified the tea you are using, you will be able to determine how many tea-scoops to use for your size of teapot. The amounts shown are approximate and in time, you will be more comfortable adjusting these to suit your own taste. Before you choose your teapot, make sure to read Quality and Type of Teapot below.
### Tea Type By Size of Tea Leaves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rolled Leaves (small balls) and Compressed*</th>
<th>Un-rolled (Loose) Leaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 cm / 3/8 inches</td>
<td>1 – 2 cm / 3/8 – ¾ inch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 - 4 cm / ¾ - 1-1/2 inches</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Te Guan Yin** (also called Gun Yam, Iron Buddha, Chinese Oolong)
- **Taiwan Oolong** (also called High Mountain Oolong)
- **Dragon Pearl Jasmine**
- **Pi Lo Chun**
- **Pu-Erh (also called Bow Lay) compressed**
- **Lap Sang Soo Chong**
- **Pu-Erh (loose)**
- **Gunpowder**
- **Golden Tips Red** (known in the West as Black or Orange Pekoe)
- **Loong Jien** (Dragon Well)
- **Pi Lo Chun**
- **White Peony**
- **Pu-Erh (loose)**
- **White Peony**
- **Pu-Erh (loose)**
- **Da Hong Pao** (also called Cliff Tea)
- **Phoenix**

*Compressed tea that has been broken into the smallest pieces possible without breaking the leaves*

With the following chart you can now calculate how many tea-scoops to use for your type of tea.

### Number of Chinese Tea-Scoops To Use Based on Size of Tea Leaves and Size of Teapot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Teapot</th>
<th>Rolled Leaves (small balls) and Compressed</th>
<th>Less than 1 cm / 3/8 inches</th>
<th>1 – 2 cm / 3/8 – ¾ inch</th>
<th>2 - 4 cm / ¾ - 1-1/2 inches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 size</td>
<td>0.5 - 1</td>
<td>0.5 - 1</td>
<td>1 – 1.5</td>
<td>1.5– 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>1.5 - 2</td>
<td>1.5 - 2</td>
<td>2 – 2.5</td>
<td>2.5 – 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>3 – 3.5</td>
<td>3 – 3.5</td>
<td>3.5 – 4</td>
<td>4 – 4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>4 – 4.5</td>
<td>4 – 4.5</td>
<td>4.5 – 5</td>
<td>5 – 5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*Compressed tea that has been broken into the smallest pieces possible without breaking the leaves*

Water Temperatures

This is an important variable to control because making tea is essentially the process of breaking down the cell walls of tea leaves to release the flavour. Gong-Fu Cha is just about doing this in a very controlled way to get the maximum flavour consistently for the maximum number of brews. Water that is too hot or not hot enough for the tea you are making will break down the leaves too quickly or too slowly and the flavour will be inconsistent. The following is a quick guide that makes it easy to get started to make good tea. Water temperatures can be approximate so don’t worry if it’s a little higher or lower. As your skill improves, you will be able to adjust the brew times to compensate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water Temperatures</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Green/White Tea</strong> and any tea made from “tips”</td>
<td><strong>75 – 80 C / 167 – 176 F</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taiwan Oolong Phoenix (young leaves)</strong></td>
<td><strong>85 – 90 C / 185 – 194 F</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pu-Erh (Bow-Lay)</strong></td>
<td><strong>95 C – boiling / 203 F – boiling</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Te Guan Yin (Gun Yam, Iron Buddha, Chinese Oolong)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Da Hong Pao (Cliff Tea)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lob Sang Soo Chong Phoenix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Boiling means when the water has just reached a slow boil with big bubbles (see Quality of Water below). If you do not have a temperature control kettle, let the water stand for 2 minutes or so after reaching a first boil to get **75 – 80 C / 167 – 176 F**. Wait **5 minutes** for **75 – 80 C / 167 – 176 F**. Many tea-makers heat the water to the desired temperature and then keep it handy in a thermos bottle.
Brewing Times

This is really where the skill of making tea comes in. The following is a general guideline for brewing times for just about any tea. Ignore any instructions on tea packaging as these are not for Gong Fu Cha.

### Brewing Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Un-compressed loose leaves and rolled leaves (small balls)</th>
<th>Compressed Tea (Pu-Erh)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rinse the leaves</td>
<td>pour off the tea as quickly as possible</td>
<td>5 - 8 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Brew</td>
<td>6 seconds</td>
<td>10 – 15 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Brew</td>
<td>4 seconds</td>
<td>8 – 10 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Brew</td>
<td>6 seconds</td>
<td>6 – 8 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Brew</td>
<td>8 seconds</td>
<td>8 – 10 seconds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Brew</td>
<td>10 seconds</td>
<td>10 – 12 seconds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This method is intended to get you making good tea as quickly as possible and gives consistently good results for all teas. As you gain more experience, you will become more comfortable in adjusting these times as well as the amount of tea used to suit your particular taste (see Advanced Brewing Technique below).

Using the guideline above, after the fifth brew, even the best quality tea will begin to lose flavour, so you can adjust as follows:

- reduce the above brew times by 2 seconds to get more brews after the fifth brew
- Increase the amount of tea used *at the beginning*, (per the guidelines above) but notice that as the larger quantity of leaves begin to expand after the fourth or fifth brew, they are taking up more volume inside the teapot and there is not much room for the water, so you get less tea per brew - but you will be able to make more brews

On the following page is a worksheet combining all the previous charts that you can print out and keep handy when you are making tea.
Worksheet – All Charts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Water Temperature &gt;&gt;</th>
<th>Rolled Leaves (small balls) and Compressed*</th>
<th>Un-rolled (Loose) Leaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 75 – 80 C / 167 – 176 F | Dragon Pearl Jasmine | Golden Tips Red (known in the West as Black or Orange Pekoe)  
|                       |                             | Loong Jien (Dragon Well)  
|                       |                             | Pi Lo Chun                
|                       |                             | White Peony              |
| 85 – 90 C / 185 – 194 F | Taiwan Oolong (also called High Mountain Oolong) | Phoenix (young leaves) |
| 95 C – boiling / 203 F – boiling** | Te Guan Yin (also called Gun Yam, Iron Buddha, Chinese Oolong)  
|                       | Pu- Erh (also called Bow Lay) compressed | Pu- Erh (also called Bow Lay) loose  
|                       |                             | Lap Sang Soo Chong  
|                       |                             | Gunpowder                

Brew Times

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Teapot</th>
<th>Volume (ml / fl oz) approximate</th>
<th>Number of People Served</th>
<th>Number of Tea Scoops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 size</td>
<td>70 / 2.4</td>
<td>1 - 2</td>
<td>0.5 - 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>100 / 3.4</td>
<td>2 - 4</td>
<td>1.5 - 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>175 / 6.0</td>
<td>3 - 5</td>
<td>3 – 3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>225 / 7.6</td>
<td>4 - 6</td>
<td>4 – 4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Compressed tea that has been broken into the smallest pieces possible without breaking the leaves
** see Quality of Water below

© 2009 All rights reserved - Tat Fat (Daniel) Lui
Quality and Type of Teapot

This is another important area that is beyond the scope of this guide, but touching on the basics is worthwhile. Serious Gong-Fu Cha enthusiasts spend many hours debating the virtues of their teapots, but there is universal agreement on these four points:

- The best tea is made in clay teapots and the best teapots are made from clay from the Yixing (Yee-jing) area of China
- Clay has excellent heat handling properties that significantly improves the taste of tea when compared to tea made in a glass or porcelain teapot
- Clay is porous and tea oils build up inside the teapot and over time, actually improve the taste of the tea
- Use only one teapot for each type of tea. Never make different teas in the same teapot unless they are from the same family or class of teas, such as green teas, or oolongs, but even this is not ideal as some teas are highly fermented and in time their strong flavour would transfer to a more delicately flavoured tea

Clay teapots of all types and qualities can be ordered from the internet but as with buying tea, this can be difficult for the beginner. The rules for buying tea apply equally to buying a teapot. Or if you want to save money or are a traditionalist, you can use the traditional Gai Wan which is an inexpensive porcelain pot with a lid and base that comes in many sizes and can be used for all teas as it can be rinsed after use.

Glass teapots are often used for Green/White and “blooming” teas as they do not absorb the delicate tea fragrance like clay and you can see the leaves expanding. But a high-fired and high quality clay teapot is still superior and like all clay teapots, improves the taste.
HOW TO MAKE GONG FU CHA

The style of Gong Fu Cha which is outlined here is the modern variation on the original ancient practice which used fires for heating, large amounts of tea, long brew times, very small teapots and produced extremely strong teas to suit the cuisine and culture of that age. So let’s make some tea. You should have at hand:

- Tea
- Teapot, Gai Wan or other glass or porcelain vessel, in the right size for the number of people being served
- Kettle
- Pitcher - glass or porcelain with a lid
- Chinese tea-scoop or Western teaspoon
- Tongs - these are an indispensable tool for handling other people’s teacups and picking up and cleaning off stray leaves. They are also inexpensive
- Strainer - a Chinese tea strainer is of a very fine mesh and specifically shaped to fit in Chinese teapots and pitchers. They are also inexpensive
- Teacups - real Chinese teacups are low, shallow and wide and very small by Western standards, like a tiny bowl and just large enough for one or two sips. This emphasises the “quality over quantity” aspect of Gong Fu Cha, where one’s concentration is on savouring every drop of tea in small amounts. Their particular shape also enables you to pick up a hot cup of tea without burning your fingers
- A surface to prepare the tea on - this collects or re-directs the water that gets splashed about when making Gong Fu Cha. One friend uses a fine wire mesh frame over a wide, shallow bowl. A large flat platter or a number of shallow bowls on towels can work or even a baking/cookie sheet with a nice cloth lining the bottom.

Optional Items

- Temperature controlled kettle
- You can purchase inexpensive tea trays with built in reservoirs that come in beautiful traditional and modern designs.
- You might wish to consider an inexpensive starter package which can be found in many tea shops. These usually include a tea tray, teapot, pitcher, gai wan, teacups and tools
Step One – Warm The Teapot, Sterilize The Teacups And Strainer

Warm up the teapot by filling with boiling water and allowing to sit. This will reduce temperature shift inside the teapot which can affect the flavour of tea. Pour boiling water on the strainer and fill the teacups to sterilize and warm them. Remember, you are serving “food” so you should practice good food handling technique. This is a courtesy to your guests and they will appreciate the care you take for their enjoyment and pleasure. Otherwise, always keep your tea making area and equipment scrupulously clean. Your equipment should also be organized so things are where you expect them to be when you reach for them. This improves your technique and cuts down on accidents and breakage.

Step Two – Rinse The Tea Leaves

Place the measured amount of tea (per the guidelines above) in the teapot and fill with the proper temperature water, allowing the water to overflow the top of the teapot until the bubbles disappear and the water runs clear. Replace the lid and immediately pour off the water (or longer if using compressed tea), then tilt the lid slightly open on the teapot. This tilting allows the heat in the teapot to escape and not “cook” the leaves, but retain the aroma of the leaves.

Step Three – First Brew

For beginners, I recommend pouring the tea from the teapot into a small pitcher (or any glass or porcelain cup with a lid) before serving the tea in teacups. You’ll see, this makes everything easier at the beginning.

Fill the teapot until the water overflows the top. Place the lid on the teapot and count 6 seconds (or whatever time scale you are using) while slowly pouring a little hot water over the teapot which ensures an even brewing temperature inside the teapot. At the end of the count, pour the tea into the pitcher, place the lid on the pitcher and tilt the lid on the teapot. Empty the teacups (using the tongs of course so as not to touch them) and serve the tea.

Step Four – Additional Brews

Repeat Step Three following the proper brew times until you have finished brewing the tea.
Step Five – Finishing Up

Remove the leaves and rinse your teapot and lid with hot water and place in the open air with the lid off to allow to dry. Tea is best made with a dry pot and this also allows the oils to set in the clay. Wash the rest of your tools and allow to air dry.

If you find that the tea you have been making might still have some brews left when you finish, you can keep the leaves right in the teapot with the lid closed for up to 12 hours. When you’re ready to make more tea, just pick up where you left off. The first brew time can be a couple seconds less than what it might normally be since the tea concentrates somewhat while it has been sitting.

Congratulations, you are now ready to move on to a more advanced level...

ADVANCED TECHNIQUES

Selecting A Clay Teapot

Your teapot will be your friend for many years so make sure there are no cracks or chips. It should have a good weight and balance, be comfortable in the hand, the handle and lid should fit your fingers, the lid fits precisely in the top opening and the spout is large enough to allow the tea to pour freely. A small spout constricts the flow of tea being poured, making the brew times longer.

- Many newer teapots come with a strainer built-in but if not, ask to have one inserted into the spout

- The shape of a teapot is said to have an effect on the flavour of the tea, with different shapes of teapots accommodating the different shapes, sizes and expansion rates of tea leaves. Here are some well known shapes:
Shapes of Teapots For Specific Types of Teas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taiwan Oolong</th>
<th>Green/White Tea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Te Guan Yin (Gun Yam, Iron Buddha, Chinese Oolong)</th>
<th>Pu-erh (Bow Lay)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Da Hong Pao (Cliff Tea) &amp; Phoenix Tea</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The finest quality teapots have a clear and distinct ring like a little bell when you lift up the lid about a quarter of an inch and allow it to drop gently on to the teapot (make sure you are holding the teapot on the flat of your hand so it is not damping the teapot in any way). The higher the pitch and the longer the ring, the finer the quality (there is more detailed information on this subject at www.realchinatea.com).

- Teapots used for Pu-erh tea are made from a more porous clay than other teapots and don’t have the distinctive bright ringing sound. These are selected by an examination of the clay which usually has a rougher texture than teapots used for other teas.

- Older teapots have a distinctive shine from the infusion of tea oils and constant use which can dull the pitch. New teapots have a similar shine from a wax coating which protects the clay and makes them look nice on the shelf. (see how to remove this coating below in Seasoning A New Teapot)
If you like antiques, a Yixing teapot such as one dating from the 1980’s, 1950’s or even late Ching Dynasty is a wonderful thing to own as they are often one-of-a-kind designs and older teapots are made from excellent clay. Some were made by very famous artists and can fetch big prices. Antique teapots have a history (verifiable or not) and have been infused with tea oils over many years. They can give a decided “thunk” rather than a clear ring because of the accumulation of oils in the clay but can still be of the finest quality. But remember, you are in the antique game now so buyer beware!

Always pour any extra tea you might have over your teapot and give it an occasional polish with a soft dry cloth. This will help to build up the oils allowing your teapot to create its own unique “taste” and gives the teapot a nice shine.

Unfortunately, just about every teapot for sale is claimed to be a Yixing teapot, so in short, when buying a teapot, deal with an expert you can trust (there is more detailed information on this subject at www.realchinatea.com).

With all this talk about high quality and antique teapots, there are excellent and inexpensive Yixing teapots for every budget and taste, from original handmade designs to mass produced ones that will make excellent tea and serve you for many years.

Advanced Brewing Technique

Tea experts know their craft so well that they only need to look at the tea leaves to determine the grade, how they should be brewed and how many brews a tea will yield. An expert will make the first brew and from that, determine how many seconds will be needed for the next brew and so on. Even the beginner can practice this way and if you keep detailed notes, you will develop your skill much faster.

The Quality Of Water

It is widely held among tea experts that fresh spring water provides just the right pH level, minerals and other elements that make the best tea. I must agree and just as coffee-makers have discovered, good water makes good tea. Experiment on your own and see the results for yourself.

When one talks about using boiling water for Gong Fu Cha, the best boil is what the Chinese call “Fish-Eye” water which is just starting to boil with large bubbles. If you boil a little longer, you will get “Crab-Eye” water with slightly smaller bubbles which is also acceptable.
There is another saying the Chinese have about the water for tea: “3 Times Boiled Is Dead Water”. This recognizes that water that is cooled and re-boiled more than 3 times has increased the ratio of the mineral content due to water boil-off and decreased the level of oxygen, both of which diminish the flavour of tea.

Seasoning A New Teapot

New teapots come with a wax coating to protect the clay and make them look shiny on the shelf (and also make them look like more expensive antique teapots). This coating must be removed before making tea. Here’s how to remove the coating and season the clay:

1. Rinse the teapot in hot water and brush vigorously inside and out with toothpaste (which is gently abrasive) and a toothbrush. Yes you read this right!

2. Put a large pot of water on the stove lined inside with a cloth. The pot should be large enough to completely submerge the teapot

3. Wrap the lid in another cloth and place in the large pot with the teapot. The cloths prevent breakage by stopping the teapot and lid from banging against the sides of the pot and each other when the water is boiling

4. Bring the water to a boil, cover and boil the teapot and lid for 30 minutes

5. After 30 minutes, turn off the heat and allow the water to cool

6. Remove the teapot and lid and rinse thoroughly in warm water

7. Optional - If you really want to season your teapot like a pro, re-fill the large pot with water, bring to a boil and add 2 – 3 tea-scoops of the tea leaves that you will be using for your teapot. Turn off the heat, cover the pot and steep the leaves for about 30 minutes to make a strong tea. Strain out the leaves and any small particles and return the tea to the pot.

   Repeat Steps 2 to 6 using this strong tea instead of water. (Straining removes small leaf particles from the water that can clog the pores of the clay and reduce the teapot’s effectiveness).

8. Your teapot is now ready to start making tea

If you should ever decide that you wish to use a teapot for making another type of tea, simply re-season the teapot per the above steps. There may be a break-in period with older pots.
Storing Tea

All teas benefit from being stored in a cool dry place where the temperature does not fluctuate very much. Tea is very good at absorbing odours so keep it away from anything smelly. Airtight containers are inexpensive and much better than the plastic pouches or fancy cardboard containers that tea typically comes in.

Almost all teas last for about one year. Green/White teas tend to deteriorate more quickly because they have not been fermented. Always ask how long a tea has been sitting on the shelf before you buy and when new teas will be in stock.

If you have airtight tea containers, you can store all Green/White teas, Taiwan Oolong and Te Guan Yin (Gun Yam, Iron Buddha, Chinese Oolong) in the refrigerator. These teas will actually improve in flavour over time but beware that once you have stored a tea in a fridge, you cannot then store it back on a shelf or the tea flavour will diminish rapidly. Do not use this technique if you do not have airtight containers or the tea will absorb every odour in your refrigerator and ruin your tea.

Pu-Erh (Bow Lay in Cantonese) tea is highly sought after and like fine wine, improves with age. It has a distinctive earthy and complex taste. One can still buy 25 and even 50 year old Pu-Erh teas but caveat emptor! Pu Erh improves quickly and dramatically when kept in a clay jar, preferably in a cool dry spot with little temperature fluctuation. Younger tea is less expensive to buy than older tea so you can buy a newer one you like and keep it for many years.

Pu-Erh tea comes loose or compressed in bricks, round cakes or bell-shaped (toa cha). If you are keeping compressed tea for many years, keep it in clay and when ready to drink, break it up into small pieces and keep in a sealed clay jar. This is called “waking up the tea” and the flavour will begin to develop more rapidly.

MORE INFORMATION

For more information about teapots and making Gong-Fu Style tea, go to [www.realchinatea.com](http://www.realchinatea.com) for articles, links and shopping.