

What is Oolong Tea?

Oolong tea is nothing more than the leaves of the *camellia sinensis* that have been processed a certain way. It is one of the four types of teas ([white](#), [green](#), oolong, and [black](#)).

Oolong teas are the most difficult of the four types of teas to process. The best way to describe oolong tea is that they are somewhere in between green and black tea. This is because they are only partially oxidized during the processing.

What is Tea Processing?

Processing tea is generally considered the art of tea. It is where many of the subtleties in taste, body, and overall character are created.

In its most basic form, it is taking the raw green leaves and deciding whether or not, and how much oxidation (or fermentation) should take place before drying them out.

Tea leaves have enzymes in their veins. When the leaf is broken, bruised, or crushed, the enzymes are exposed to oxygen resulting in oxidation. The amount of oxidation depends upon how much of the enzymes are exposed and for how long.

The Processing of Oolong Tea

The processing of oolong tea requires only a partial oxidation of the leaves. After the leaves are plucked, they are laid out to wither for about 8 to 24 hours. This lets most of the water evaporate.

Then the leaves are tossed in baskets in order to bruise the edges of the leaves. This bruising only causes the leaves to partially oxidize because only a portion of the enzymes are exposed to air.

Next, the leaves are steamed in order to neutralize the enzymes and stop any oxidation. Oolong tea can have varying degrees of oxidation. Some are closer to black teas, and some are closer to green.

After that, a final drying takes place. From there, it goes off to be sorted, graded, and packaged.