

Glossary of Pu-erh Tea Terms

Pu-erh tea – All teas are made from the single tea plant, *Camillia Sinensis*. However, Pu-erh tea is made from a broad-leaf variety, called “*Yunnan Dayeh*,” native to China’s Yunnan province. Tea leaves used to make Pu-erh tea must be sun-dried to retain a certain aroma.

Pu er – Alternative spelling of Pu-erh tea. See “*Pu-erh tea*.”

Puerh – Alternative spelling of Pu-erh tea. See “*Pu-erh tea*.”

Pu’erh – Alternative spelling of Pu-erh tea. See “*Pu-erh tea*.”

Yunnan – Yunnan is a province located in the southwest corner of China. The southern border of the province lies adjacent to Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. This area is believed to be the birth place of all teas. Yunnan is also the most ethnically diverse province in China.

Raw Material– Pu-erh raw material refers to freshly harvested tea leaves that have been fried, rolled and sun-dried in open air. This is the first step of the Pu-erh tea processing. The “raw materials” can be made into cakes or other compressed forms or they can be made into ripe Pu-erh.

Mao Cha – Chinese term for “*raw material*,” that is used to make tea.

Sun-dried – Refers to a traditional way of drying the fresh tea leaves under the sunlight in open air.

Raw Pu-erh – Refers to tea made from the Pu-erh tea raw materials (mao cha) without further processing. Raw Pu-erh can be in loose leaf form or made into round cakes, rectangular or square bricks, or a dome shape form called Tuo Cha.

Sheng Pu-erh – Sheng is the Chinese word for raw. “*Sheng Pu-erh*”, therefore, means “*raw Pu-erh*.”

Young Raw Pu-erh – Refers to Pu-erh that is freshly produced or just a few years old. The tea made from young raw Pu-erh is light yellow and the wet leaves are olive green.

Aged Raw Pu-erh – Refers to raw Pu-erh that was produced many years ago and that has undergone an aging process. This aged tea has undergone a natural fermentation process whereby microbes have biologically transformed the tea leaves over time, causing the leaves to darken and the flavor if the tea brewed from the leaves to change, becoming smoother and mellower. Aged raw Pu-erh is the most sought-after Pu-erh tea by tea aficionados.

Vintage Pu-erh – Refers to aged raw Pu-erh of a particular year.

Naturally Aged Pu-erh – See “*Aged Raw Pu-erh.*”

Dry Storage – Dry storage refers to the process of aging Pu-erh tea in an environment without artificially adding increased humidity.

Wet Storage – Refers to aging the Pu-erh tea in a moisture-infused environment with humidity over 85%. The sole purpose of wet storage is to speed up the aging of the tea. Essentially, it is a short cut to producing a tea that looks and tastes like an aged raw Pu-erh.

Ripe Pu-erh – Refers to Pu-erh tea that has been artificially fermented by a “cooking” process. This “cooking” process involves incubating the tea in a moisture-rich environment wherein microbial activity causes the temperature of the tea leaves to rise, drastically intensifying and accelerating the fermentation process. The Ripe Pu-erh offers an alternative to having to wait ten to thirty years for the Raw Pu-erh to age or mature. It is a quick way to achieve the smoothness loved by consumers and to remove the astringency and grassiness that are typically present in Pu-erh raw material.

Cooked Pu-erh – See “*Ripe Pu-erh.*”

Shou Pu-erh – See “*Ripe P-uerh.*” “*Shou*” is the Chinese word for “cooked” or “ripe.” See “*Ripe Pu-erh.*”

Artificially Fermented Pu-erh – See “*Ripe Pu-erh.*”

Tea cake – Refers to Pu-erh tea that has been compressed into a round disc shape. A tea cake can be made of either Raw or Ripe Pu-erh. The traditional size of a tea cake is around 7” in diameter with a weight of 357 grams (roughly 12.5 oz). However, due to market demand, many tea cakes are made into smaller cakes that weigh 100g or 200g.

Beeng Cha – “Beeng Cha” is the Chinese term for “tea cake.” “*Beeng*” means “*cake*” and “*Cha*” means “*tea*.”

Tea Brick – A tea brick refers to Pu-erh tea that has been compressed into a brick form. The most common shapes of a tea brick are rectangular and square. It typically weighs 250 grams (roughly 8.5 oz), although bricks in other sizes can be found in the market. A tea cake can be made of Raw or Ripe Pu’erh.

Tuo Cha – Refers to Pu-erh tea that has been compressed into a dome or bowl shape. The Tuo Cha has a deep hollow area at the bottom, allowing the tea leaves to dry after compression. Tuo Cha is typically 100g or 250 g in weight. Tuo Cha can be made of Raw or Ripe Pu-erh.

Stack – A stack of Pu-erh tea contains 7 tea cakes. Traditionally, the tea cakes are wrapped in natural bamboo leaves. Tea cakes were packed into stacks for easy transportation and storage.

Tung – Tung is the Chinese word for “*stack*.”

Seven Sons Tea Cakes – The Seven Sons Tea Cake refers to compressed tea cakes manufactured between sometime in the 1970’s to 1997 by state-owned tea factories in China. Seven is an auspicious number for the Chinese, symbolizing fertility, prosperity and family unification. As such, Seven Sons Tea Cakes are often used as wedding or New Year presents. The good luck aspect is the reason why seven tea cakes were chosen to complete a tung, as opposed to stacks in other numbers.

Early Spring Harvest – Tea plants are dormant after the last harvest in Autumn until the first bud breaks in Spring of the following year. Early Spring Harvest refers to the harvest of the first budsets that break before the first rain. It is considered the best harvest of the year. Following the first harvest, new budsets break again in a few weeks. Between February and April, there are altogether three spring harvests.

Summer Harvest – Summer harvest takes place between May and July during the monsoon season

Autumn Harvest – Autumn harvest takes place between August and October

Ancient Tea Trees – Refers to tea trees that were planted from seeds hundreds of years ago by the indigenous people living in the tea mountains of Yunnan. These tea trees are allowed to grow tall without pruning and they are located on hillsides and slopes among other forest plants. Most of these tea trees are grown in high elevation and free of the use of fertilizers and pesticides. These trees have a main high trunk with branches grown from the upper part of the main stem.

Old-growth Tea Trees – See “*Ancient Tea Trees.*”

Lao Qiaomu – The Chinese term for “*ancient tea trees.*”

Plantation Bushes – Refers to tea bushes that are planted by cloning and are kept small for easy plucking. These bushes are planted densely in plantation-style. The lifespan of these bushes are not as long as the life span of tea trees planted from seeds.

Ten Famous Tea Mountains – Refers to areas where famous Pu-erh teas are grown and produced. They are all located along the southern part of Yunnan Province. These mountains are Youle, Gedeng, Yibang, Mangzhi, Manzhuan, Mansa, Nunnuo, Bulang, Xiding and Bada.

Gaiwan – Gaiwan literally means a “lidded bowl.” A gaiwan consists of a lid, a bowl and a saucer. It can be used as a tea cup or a receptacle for brewing tea. It is typically made of porcelain.

Piao-I Teapot – Made and patented by the Piao-I Enterprise Co., Ltd in Taiwan, the teapot is comprised of an upper chamber and a lower chamber. Brew the tea in the upper chamber. Once brewing is complete, press a button and the brewed tea drains to the lower chamber from where it can be poured for serving. The upper chamber can be removed leaving the lower chamber to serve as a mug. Made of strong beaker glass and is dish washer safe.