

# Gyokuro – The Shaded Tea

---

Gyokuro (玉露) is one of Japan's finest green teas. Literally, Gyokuro means "jade dew" or "jewel dew" and was introduced in 1835 by the company Yamamotoyama. Yamamoto Kahei, the owner of the company, traveled the same year to Uji in order to learn the technique of tea shading. This technique is used for producing Tencha, the base for Matcha. However, the new learned technology led to a different tea - Gyokuro!

## Production



*Saemidori tea varietal*

Basically, Gyokuro can be made from any tea varietal. However, some varieties have been proven particularly suitable due to color, taste and aroma. Some varieties particularly used for producing Gyokuro are: Asahi, Asagiri, Asatsuyu, Gokou, Okumidori, Yamakai and Saemidori. The latter is particularly recommended due to its beautiful deep green color. By the way: The Japanese word "midori" (緑) is the word for the color green. To prepare the tea bushes for Gyokuro they are covered for about 20 days before harvesting with nets or with straw. This leads on one hand to an increased production of chlorophyll (leaf green), and on the other hand, the L-theanine contained in tea leaf is protected from UV radiation. The UV radiation otherwise converts the L-theanine, which is responsible for the tea's sweetness and umami, in the bitter substance catechine.

Compared to Kabusecha, which is also a shaded tea, there are two differences to Gyokuro. First, the shading period for Kabusecha is only about two weeks while Gyokuro is shaded 20 days or longer. Second, for Kabusecha is only 50% of the sunlight filtered while for Gyokuro it's between 70 and 90%.

# Shading technique

For Gyokuro are two different shading techniques (Kanreisha) used: Tana or Jikagise.

## Tana technique



*Tana technique (Source: [www.pref.kyoto.jp](http://www.pref.kyoto.jp))*

The Tana technique requires the establishment of frames for the black nets and is therefore very expensive. The advantage of the Tana technique is that you can move freely and the tea bushes can be examined easily. Furthermore, the distance of the nets to the shrubs allows optimal air circulation and waterlogging in tea leaves can be prevented.

## Honzu technique



*Honzu technique (Source: [www.pref.kyoto.jp](http://www.pref.kyoto.jp))*

A variation of the Tana technique is the traditional Honzu technique which uses bamboo and straw to cover the tea bushes instead of plastic nets. The organic material of the cover also nourish the soil with minerals and has a positive effect on the tea's taste.

## Jikagise technique



*Jikagise technique (Source: [www.pref.kyoto.jp](http://www.pref.kyoto.jp))*

The Jikagise technique uses either nets or bamboo mats which are placed direct on top of the tea bushes. This technique is also used for Kabusecha. The benefit of this technique is that it's simple to use but has the disadvantage that waterlogging can form which can lead to mold. Furthermore, an examination of the tea bushes is more laborious compared to the Tana technique.

The tea leaves for Gyokuro are after harvest the same way as Sencha processed by steaming, rolling and drying.

## Preparation



*Kyusu teapot (Source: Wikipedia)*

Ideal for preparation of Gyokuro is a Kyusu or a Shiboridash teapot. Of course, a Gaiwan or any other teapot will do but it's easier with the right tools. The brewing temperature should be between 50 - 60 ° C to achieve a maximum umami taste. At higher temperatures are more catechins released into the brew and the tea gets bitter. In case you don't own a thermometer I recommend this trick to estimate the temperature: If the water is cool enough that you can hold the teapot in your hands then is the water about 60° Celsius.

Gyokuro can be infused about three times. In my opinion the the second infusion tastes the best. 5g of tea leaves per teapot is just fine. If a larger amount is used then the brewing time can be shortened and more infusions can be made. For the last infusion it is recommended to raise the water's temperature in order to get the all the remnant out of the tea leaves .

## Update

Gyokuro is now available in our shop as [Shincha Gyokuro](#). The used variety is Gokou.