

The delicious taste of Japanese green tea begins in the tea field

Naturally, tea is an agricultural product, and similar to fruits and vegetables, high-quality tea leaves can only be grown and picked after much attention to feeding the soil with fertilizer, practicing irrigation and pruning. Producing high-quality teas with umami such as Gyokuro(refined green tea indigenous to Japan) is labor-intensive, since the tea fields must be completely covered and shaded from the sunlight for a fixed period prior to picking. In particular, cultivating high-quality teas is a precise process, whereby young leaves are picked manually, one by one, according to tradition. Japan has four distinct seasons that affect the period when tea can be harvested, and teas harvested at different times have contrasting flavors. Of the various types of Japanese green tea available, the young tea leaves used for Gyokuro, Matcha and high-grade sencha can only be harvested for a short time during spring.

Japan's unique "steaming" method produces the beautiful green tea color

To prevent oxidization, freshly-picked tea leaves are steamed. This unique Japanese process gives Japanese green tea its own special flavor and beautiful color. Following this, the tea leaves are rolled and dried until they are drawn into a long, thin shape. The end product is aracha(unprocessed tea). Although at one time all of these processes were performed by hand by skilled experts, nowadays most teas are processed by machine ; however, the manual hand-rolling method serves as the foundation for this technology, and even today, the Japanese art and spirit of making tea is passed down by skilled experts in the industry.

Producing the subtle aroma and strong flavor of shiage requires great skill

An important characteristic of Japanese green tea is the effort of the expert in turning it from aracha to shiage(refined tea). This process is so important that each company within the tea manufacturing industry keeps it a secret. However, it involves sieving and cutting the tea leaves so that they can be sorted with attention to color and shape, after which each manufacturer uses their own method of hiire(drying) to further enhance the aroma and flavor of the tea by drying the leaves a second time. Lastly, in the same way that whiskey is blended, a specialist sorts between the subtle differences in aroma and taste to blend the teas for the ultimate flavor. The subtle aroma and strong flavor unique to Japanese green tea is a result of this detailed and careful process.

The characteristically strong flavor of Japanese green tea is a harmonious blend of "umami" (flavor of the highest quality), "astringency" and "bitterness" – umami is derived from the amino acid theanine, astringency from catechins, and bitterness from caffeine. Japanese green tea contains many active ingredients said to be beneficial to the health of modern people, who are troubled by stress and lifestyle-related diseases.

Japanese cuisine is currently attracting worldwide attention as a health food, and Japanese green tea is the perfect accompaniment as it can be enjoyed together with meals. Japanese green

tea acts to accentuate subtle foods that rely on the taste of the ingredients as well as giving the palate a sensation of freshness after the meal. Japanese green tea is can be consumed throughout the day – before, during and after meals.