

FEATURES

Muscatel Flavor is Unmatched

By Sanjay Guha | May 1, 2017



The distinctive muscatel flavor is one of the most difficult flavors to identify. I have been tasting various kinds of tea, including Darjeelings, since 1975. But to learn about muscatel took dedication because you need to know the taste to identify it. I was taught to taste at least 50 cups of muscatel tea.

The magic of muscatel Teas grown in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, India, are called Darjeeling. Derived from the Tibetan word *Dorje* (meaning thunderbolt) and *Ling* (the Sanskrit word, meaning land), Darjeeling has become one of the most evocative words in tea semantics. Darjeeling is a large town in the Himalayan foothills. Geographically speaking, it is on the Eastern Himalaya range. The district has approximately 85 tea estates that produce various qualities of orthodox, green and white teas, growing at approximately 1,200 to 7,300 feet. The area's annual production is approximately 7 million kilos. The weather is gentle, slightly cold and more intense during winter, when there is no tea production. However, during the summer months, cold northern winds blow south from the mountains. It helps the leaves grow during May and June. The tea leaves grown during this time have certain characteristics that are particular to this period called second flush. During this second-flush period, some estates (not more

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than 12) attract strange insects: green flies called jassids and thrips. They remain very active on the buds and on the tops of leaves. Although these green flies are pests, they act as catalysts in producing flavor from these leaves. This flavor is called muscatel. Germans gave this name because they found the aroma to be similar to that of grapes. In simple terms, these green flies feed on tender tea leaves by sucking juices inside the leaves, resulting in the green leaves turning yellow in color. During this process, a substance called terpene is produced. With some moderate oxidation of terpene during the fermentation process, the tea gains the flavor of muscatel or honey.

Tea with character This unique flavor is short-lived because the insects do not fly over the tea buds more than two weeks a year. One needs to pluck the leaves carefully and process them immediately to retain flavor freshness. Plucking and fermenting these leaves are the most important criteria. This is one tea which, when it matures, becomes even more pleasant to drink. The liquors are slightly yellow-orange in color. The infused leaves have a particularly sweet aroma. The dry leaves are small, as they are from China cultivars. Many people have approached me over the years to teach them how to identify the muscatel flavor. As I trained, you can train your palate. Once you have the palate sharpened, you will pick up the flavor. 

At World Tea Expo: Join author Sanjay Guha to learn more about muscatel teas, how to identify them and how to incorporate them into your Darjeeling line. Session: [The Allure & Mystery of Muscatel Teas](#) When: 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Wednesday, June 14, 2017 Where: N239