

How to cultivate your Yixing teapot

STEP 1 -

Before using your precious *Yixing* teapot, check whether the air vent is clear of blockage. Test the flow of water and if it is not smooth, clear the holes inside the spout of any debris. Finally examine whether there are clay deposits within the teapot, which if present can be easily removed by scraping it with a piece of wood or bamboo.

STEP 2 -

Boil a pot of water and place the teapot into the water carefully. Boil it for 30 to 40 minutes. Remove the teapot and soak it in a basin of warm water for a few minutes and then let it air dry.

STEP 3 -

Now place some tea leaves (any tea leaves will do) into the previously boiled pot of water and boil it together with the teapot for an hour. Rinse the teapot and let it air dry naturally.

STEP 4 -

Before using the teapot, determine which tea leaves you are going to brew in it. Do not brew different kind of tea leaves in the same teapot. *Zisha* clay is very porous, which is why it is such a good vessel for brewing tea -- it is able to retain the flavour as well as trap tea particles in these pores. With frequent usage, more and more tea particles are trapped, so that every time you brew tea, fragrance is released which makes the current brewing of tea taste better than if it was brewed in a new teapot.

After you have determined the tea to use for this teapot, do not start using the teapot yet, but use it as a "*gong-dao*" (justice) pot – a pot which is used as a pourer, i.e. tea is poured into it before being poured into tea cups. After it has absorbed several months of flavour in this way, then you can begin to use it for brewing.

STEP 5 -

Every time you brew tea, use the teapot as "*gong-dao*" pot. That builds up the inside of the pot. But you can also 'cultivate' the outside. If you are using a red tea, the first infusion is often discarded. This can be poured over the exterior of the *gong-dao* teapot. For green or semi-fermented teas where the first infusion is not discarded, reserve the last infusion (which is already diluted) to rinse the exterior of the teapot. This enables the tea oil to stain the exterior of the teapot and helps patina to grow.

STEP 6 -

At the end of each session, fill the teapot with used tea leaves and water and leave it overnight or even till the next session. Before the next session, clear the tea leaves and repeat Step 5 again. The teapot should be ready for brewing after 3 months.

STEP 7 -

At the end of a session, use a tea cloth to wipe and polish the exterior surface of the teapot. Continue doing it for another 3 months and I guarantee that a rich patina will grow on the surface of the teapot.

Your teapot will start to look lovely and somehow you can swear that the clay seems very much different compared to when you first bought the teapot. The above is what tea connoisseurs meant when they say "*yang hu*" or "cultivating a teapot". Enjoy yourself!