

Roasted Leafhopper High Mountain Oolong Tea

Harvest: Medium batch
Season: June 2017

Region: Guanwushan, Taiwan
Elevation: 1550m

Oxidation: Light-medium
Roast: Medium roasted

Flavor: *Sweet nutty aroma. Balanced, toasted grains with honey flavor. Heady, complex finish.*

BREWING GUIDE:

 7g

 300mL

 95°C

 3 minutes

GARDEN

This batch of tea comes from the relatively new Xueba High Mountain Tea producing region in northern Taiwan. This region is noted for high elevation farms, ample precipitation, and cooler climate. This late spring batch was allowed to be affected by the Green Leaf Hopper — a tiny insect that feeds on the sap of new tea leaf buds, creating a honey-like flavor in the tea. This magical little bug is responsible for creating Oriental Beauty Oolong as well as Concubine Oolong.

TASTING NOTES

This month's batch of tea leaves are from the very same batch that we shared in the Eco-Cha Tea Club last November, but which have been roasted twice, for about 15 hours total. This amount of roasting classifies as a light-medium roast. The fresh vibrant unroasted flavor profile in the November batch has now been cured and balanced by the roasting effect,

and a mildly roasted character has been attained. If you look back at the appearance of the dried leaves in November's tasting notes blog, they had a distinctly greenish-yellow highlights resulting from the bug-bitten effect on the leaves. Now the leaves are considerably darker, yet still maintain deep green hues.

The appearance of the brewed tea has gained substance, and become a deeper yellowish gold in comparison to the thinner, lighter unroasted brew. This coincides with the flavor profile in that the roasted version is heartier, with a more balanced character. The aroma coming off the leaves from the initial rinse is reminiscent of buttered carrots or yams. After the first brew, the aroma is more like grilled corn, cooling off into freshly baked scones. The second pour brought on stronger roasted vegetable notes, but again cooling off into a pastry aroma.

Commonly with bug-bitten teas, the flavor can be intense, so be attentive to

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not over-brew in the first couple pours. There are sweet floral overtones at the start, moving into fruity and roasted vegetable notes, and by the third brew the honey character comes through in a more balanced and smooth composition. Vibrant, almost tingly qualities coming from a balanced combination of sweet, floral and bitter flavors — bug-bitten is really in a category of its own. And noticing the effect of roasting the leaves even lightly allows us to experience the transformation in the composition of the leaves - offering a distinctly different character. a savory bouquet of fresh herbs. The overall character of this tea is especially vibrant, while remaining smooth and balanced throughout the brew, with almost no bitter/astringent edge.

THE STORY OF THIS TEA

Last November, Eco-Cha Tea Club members got to experience the original unroasted flavor profile of a Leafhopper High Mountain Oolong,

also referred to simply as "bug bitten tea", or "yeh nah day" in the Taiwanese dialect. When we sourced that batch of tea, we conceived of a "secret" plan to first share half of this batch of tea unroasted, then roast the other half in order to give our members the opportunity to taste the difference between the unroasted and roasted versions of the very same batch of Leafhopper High Mountain Oolong Tea.

This batch of tea comes from the most recently developed High Mountain Oolong Tea producing region, located in northern Taiwan. Here in the industry, it is most commonly referred to as Guanwushan, in the vicinity of Xueba National Park (photo above). The rugged high elevation slopes of the northernmost central mountain range provide an ideal climate for High Mountain Tea production.

This crop was harvested in June, when the new leaf growth following early spring harvest was allowed to grow naturally. In effect, it was an invitation

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for the legendary Green Leafhopper to come and perform its magic. This tiny grasshopper-like insect likes to feed on the sap of the new leaves, which results in a chemical composition in the leaf that offers a unique honey-essence flavor in the tea. The Leafhopper is what creates the renowned Oriental Beauty Oolong Tea from northern Taiwan, and the subsequent Concubine Oolong produced in central Taiwan.

The tea leaves were allowed to oxidize significantly more than a standard High Mountain Oolong Tea. The effect of the Leafhopper, combined with a customized processing results in a particularly full-flavored, strong character. Tea leaves of this constitution literally have more substance that results in a bold and complex flavor profile.

Our dear friend who we first met over 20 years ago was kind enough to share half of the amount of tea that he sourced with us. He knows we are always looking for special batches of tea for our Tea Club, and invited us to

come taste this one. He never says "Do you want some of this tea?", but the invitation to taste it is itself his way of offering it. And when we asked him if he would be willing to roast half of our share, he did not hesitate.

After decades of managing his family farm, A-bao now specializes in tea roasting. He sources tea from many sources, and carefully considers the character of each batch and roasts the leaves according to his assessment. He roasted this batch of tea twice, for a total of nearly 20 hours, starting at less than 100°C and finishing at over 120°C. We are excited to be offering this educational experience of two versions of the same batch of "bug bitten" High Mountain Tea with our Tea Club members.