



eco-cha
TEA CLUB
Honey Oolong Tea

Harvest: Small batch
Season: Spring 2018

Region: Yonglong, Taiwan
Elevation: 700m

Oxidation: Medium/heavy
Roast: Light roast

Flavor: *Distinct honey, floral aroma. Sweet, nutty, tangy character. Heady, honey-essence dry finish.*

BREWING GUIDE:

 8g

 300ml

 95°C

 3 minutes

GARDEN

Our source of Dong Ding Oolong said that Green Leafhoppers were present at harvest, but the mysterious honey-essence flavor was not evident until they started roasting the leaves to make Dong Ding Oolong. Such is the magical effect of this insect that loves to feed on the sap of the newly sprouted leaves! Only one plot of tea from their farm offered this flavor profile from their spring crop. Nature's gift!

TASTING NOTES

Batch #33 is well oxidized, and lightly roasted. The leaves were processed to be made into a traditional style Dong Ding Oolong Tea. But upon being roasted once, they revealed their bug-bitten character by offering distinct honey notes in the flavor profile. Given that the leaves were only roasted once, there is little or no roasted flavor. But the transformation of chemical compounds that occurred in the leaves as a result of roasting is

quite evident. In other words, this batch is very different from the original unroasted version. The results of a single roasting are mostly noticeable due to the effect of the Green Leafhopper as the leaves grew. And the nature of this effect is impossible to determine until the leaves are processed and then roasted afterwards.

The extensive oxidation and minimal roasting offer a flavor profile that has the rich, density of Small Leaf Black Tea while still maintaining enough freshness to give it complexity and vibrancy. Sweet, ripe fruity notes balanced by mildly astringent nutty/woody tones. Add to this an unmistakable honey essence in both the aroma and on the palate. It's a proper Oolong in its complexity, and a signature bug-bitten batch of tea.

THE STORY OF THIS TEA

This month's batch of tea being shared with the Eco-Cha Tea Club is from our ongoing source of Dong Ding Oolong Tea. A mom, dad, and son team manage



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their small family farm and process their crops on their own. And the recent spring harvest offered the pleasant surprise of one day's harvest turning out to be Honey Oolong. This name is properly used when the flavor of the tea has a distinct honey character that results from the Green Leafhopper working its magic. The Leafhopper (*Jacobiasca formosana*) is a tiny green bug that likes to feed on the sap of the tender new leaf buds.

The leaf buds being bitten by this tiny green bug creates an immune system response in the plant that changes the chemical compounds in the bitten leaves. The effect, however, is seemingly mysterious and unpredictable! When this batch of tea was finished being processed, this family did not notice a "bug bitten flavor". But then, weeks later, when they began to roast this tea — as usual, in the making of Dong Ding Oolong — the honey flavor was distinctly noticeable after the first roasting! So with this batch that we have to share, the farmer left well enough alone after the first roasting, being quite satisfied with

the flavor profile as it is!

We've heard similar accounts over the years from friends' experiences in roasting bug bitten leaves. The honey character literally appears and disappears, seemingly randomly, as a result of roasting! Our current batch of High Mountain Concubine Oolong has a similar story. Upon first roasting, the honey flavor was quite noticeable, but the artisan wanted a more pronounced roasted character, and proceeded to roast it again. After the second roasting, the honey flavor was gone! So she just packaged it up and let it rest for almost a year, then roasted it again, only to have the honey flavor be more prominent than ever! True story!

When we visited their home to taste their spring tea a few months ago, Mrs. Xie related how, on the day of harvest, the tea pickers were complaining about the relatively minimal yield of this crop. They complained because they are paid by weight. The leaves were more scarce than usual because the growth of the leaves is



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stunted as a result of being bitten by the Leafhopper. She also said that Leafhoppers were still present among the tea plants on the day of harvest. But that is the magic of this little bug — you just never know what it's going to end up tasting like! This is why it is not popular among tea farmers. It's just too unpredictable in the processing, along with the fact that the yield can be seriously compromised as a result of the stunted growth. So bug bitten tea that turns out well is truly special. It's a unique combination of factors that results in each batch turning out differently.