



eco<sup>cha</sup>  
TEA CLUB  
Honey Hong Shui Oolong Tea

Harvest: Hand-picked, small batch

Season: Winter 2019  
Region: Yonglong, Taiwan

Elevation: 700m

**Flavor:** *Sweet, fruitwood aroma. Complex array of stone fruit, honey, floral and mineral notes. Balanced dry/sweet, port/sherry finish.*

**BREWING GUIDE:**

8g

300ml

95°C

3 minutes

## GARDEN

Our source of Dong Ding Oolong said that this crop was visibly affected by the Green Leafhopper. The leaves were stunted and a bit gnarled, so they decided to oxidize the leaves vigorously and extensively. The result is a unique meeting of Oolong and Black tea in character, augmented by the bug-bitten factor. Only one plot of tea from their farm was bug bitten leaf from their winter crop.

## TASTING NOTES

The Chinese "hong shui" means "red water", and the term has been adopted (or revived, depending on who you ask) as a name for heavily oxidized Oolong Tea. The name is used to designate a type of Oolong to stand on its own, and not be devalued by popular judging standards and marketing trends in Taiwan. The popular High Mountain Oolong Tea is a lightly oxidized tea with a bright golden, yellowish-green color. And even the competition standards set for Dong Ding Oolong Tea are a lighter golden-orange. But Hong Shui is, in fact,

a proper tea on its own, and the level of oxidation is simply a variation in processing, not a fault or shortcoming in terms of its value. The processing methods to make this type of tea are actually how tea was made in Lugu (and many other places most likely), Taiwan, before tea became a commercial commodity.



To most of us, the dried leaves in the photo above look pretty much like most rolled Oolong Teas made in Taiwan. But a more scrutinizing eye will notice a few



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fundamentals about their appearance that tell their story. First, they are not tightly rolled into neat, uniformly shaped nuggets. This could be intentional, in a more traditional style, or it could be the condition of the leaves that don't allow them to be rolled tightly. Secondly, the coloration of the leaves is not uniform. The color variation essentially indicates partial, yet significant oxidation. The leaves also appear to be unroasted, as roasting will darken the leaves, making them more uniform in color. Thirdly, the stems are fairly thick and substantial, indicating that the leaves are relatively mature.

All of these factors collectively point to leaves that were cultivated naturally, affected by pests, allowed to mature, and then arduously processed — based on their condition when they were plucked. And all of these factors are typical in the appearance of Hong Shui Oolong's dried leaves. And leaves that look like this are much more likely to have a "bug-bitten" character — which is most obviously noticed by the honey notes in its flavor profile.



Visual assessment of the brewed leaves is much easier to perceive all of the above mentioned points. These are leaves that grew tough in response to being bug-bitten, which made them stubborn in their processing. This warranted extensive withering and shuffling to induce oxidation, but the oxidation is still mostly on the edges of the leaves given their tough consistency

So that's the background of these leaves that, in the end come down to

A photograph of two people, a man and a woman, standing in a lush green tea field. The man is on the left, wearing an orange shirt and grey pants, waving his hand. The woman is on the right, wearing a blue shirt and a wide-brimmed hat, also waving. The tea plants are neatly arranged in rows, and the background shows more of the field under a bright sky.

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the aromatic and flavor profile they offer when brewed. This is indeed a singular batch of tea that cannot be replicated. The growing conditions, most obviously including the magic of the Green Leafhopper, and the processing methods chosen by skilled Oolong artisans make it a one-of-a-kind.

These leaves possess a complexity that warrants exploration in brewing methods. We recommend starting with a 1:20 to 1:25 ratio of leaf to water. For

example, we used about 8.5g of leaves in a 200mL teapot, and brewed with boiling temp. water for about one minute intervals. We also encourage you to save some of the brew to let it cool down to room temperature, and even let it sit for at least an hour. Its constitution changes, and many different flavor notes can be enjoyed. The flavor profile of this tea also lends itself well to making iced tea, and will make a fine cold brew as well!

#### THE STORY OF THIS TEA

Qilin Lake in the photo to the left is a landmark that lies at the center of 3 small villages renowned for producing traditional Dong Ding Oolong Tea. Zhangya, Yonglong, and Fenghuang villages are the historical origin of Taiwan's most famous traditional tea making culture.

This month's batch #54 of the Eco-Cha Tea Club is a Honey Hong Shui Oolong Tea sourced from our friends who have provided our Dong Ding Oolong Tea and our Small Leaf Black Tea in recent years. They also made Batch #33 of the





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Eco-Cha Tea Club which we shared in August 2018. Batch #33 was similar to this month's batch in that they were both made with the help of the Green Leafhopper.

These two batches of tea also differ significantly, as each growing season has its own unique recipe in producing a crop of fresh leaf, including the timing and the extent that the leaves are "bug-bitten". The tea farmer must assess condition of the fresh produce upon harvesting, acknowledging the entire growing season, in determining how to cure a given batch of leaf.

The crop of new leaf growth that was made into this month's batch of the Eco-Cha Tea Club was affected by Green Leafhoppers in its early leaf bud stage. And when the farmer cut back the weeds between the rows of tea trees, the Leafhoppers dined solely on tea leaf buds after the other plants were removed. At this point, seeing the what the insects had already done to the crop, our friend decided to forego using any pesticides on this plot of tea, and let it grow naturally. So this crop new leaf was very stunted

and gnarled by the time it was harvested, and it yielded a fraction of the norm for this season.

So, while Batch #33 was processed as a standard traditional Dong Ding Oolong, this month's batch was oxidized much more. This decision to push the oxidation was in response the fact that this crop of leaves had been severely affected by the Leafhopper and perhaps other natural influences. And whereas the bug-bitten factor was not even noticed in the flavor profile of Batch #33 until after it was roasted, this month's batch had a very noticeable honey-like note to it without any roasting at all. So this batch was left as is, following a brief, low-temperature "dry roast" to remove any remaining moisture in the leaves.

All the tea that we procure from this source was planted by the dad on the right in the header photo above, and most of it was planted about 40 years ago. He boasts that his plants are still healthy and producing well as a result of his sustainable farm management. The most significant aspect of this claim is that has never used weed killers on the land he

A photograph of two people in a tea field. A man in an orange shirt stands on the left, waving. A woman in a blue shirt and a conical hat sits on the ground on the right, also waving. The background is a lush green tea plantation.

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inherited, — despite the fact that these “foreign” products were ubiquitous some 30 years ago. This is one farmer who has never bought Roundup. We like him a lot, and he has been acknowledged as a respected traditional tea maker by his community.