

Longan Charcoal Roasted High Mountain Oolong

Harvest: Hand-picked,
small batch.
Spring 2016

Region: Shanlinxi, Taiwan.
Elevation: 1300m

Batch Size: small
Medium Oxidation
Heavily Roasted

Flavor: Robust, roasted, complex aroma. Very smooth texture and balanced, full, rich flavor. Lasting tangy, mild peat finish.

GARDEN

This batch of tea was cultivated in the renowned Shanlinxi High Mountain Oolong Tea producing region. Given that this area is just above Lugu Township, Taiwan's most thriving hub of traditional tea craft, it offers more variables of curing methods than the other major high mountain tea producing region. This batch was oxidized more than a standard Dong Ding, in preparation for extensive roasting.

TASTING NOTES

These tea leaves were harvested in the Shanlinxi High Mountain Tea growing region last spring, and have undergone 8 separate roasting sessions. The first three preliminary roastings were done in a conventional oven in preparation for the traditional method of using charcoal made from the Longan fruitwood. Longan fruit (which translates literally as "Dragon Eye") is a small fruit with a leathery peel, and is related to the Lychee. It is often dried and used to make fruit tea, and is known for its warming, sweet character and relaxing effect. This dried Longan fruit flavor is detectable in both the

aroma wafting from the brewed leaves, and the touch of syrupy sweetness on the palate. This sweet note is a bit like molasses in that it is balanced with a prominent roasted character and the innate mildly bitter aspect of Oolong tea.

The overall composition of this tea is a very rich, smooth, hearty character that is achieved by extensive roasting, which concentrates the the inherent qualities in the tea leaves and infuses them with charcoal roastiness. The roasting method involves insulating the heat from the live coals at the base of the roaster with a thick layer of charcoal ash. The tea leaves are spread on a screen tray above the layer of ash and are very slowly roasted at low temperature (90°-120°C) with no exposure to smoke whatsoever. This batch has undergone 5 charcoal roasting sessions in addition to the 3 preliminary roastings, for a total of about 50 hours!

Perhaps the most evident means of determining that these leaves were expertly roasted is in the assessment of the brewed leaves. They are still very

Longan Charcoal Roasted High Mountain Oolong

Harvest: Hand-picked,
small batch.
Spring 2016

Region: Shanlinxi, Taiwan.
Elevation: 1300m

Batch Size: small
Medium Oxidation
Heavily Roasted

Flavor: Robust, roasted, complex aroma. Very smooth texture and balanced, full, rich flavor. Lasting tangy, mild peat finish.

supple and even maintain a considerable amount of their original green hue in their appearance. When this original character is preserved through such an extensive roasting process, the optimal results in quality are achieved. Due to the concentrated effect of roasting, less leaves should be used when brewing. About 20-25% less than the normal amount is recommended. So if you normally use 9-10g for a 150ml pot, only 7g of these charcoal roasted leaves are needed, and these leaves have extraordinary brewing endurance as well!

THE STORY OF THIS TEA

The total amount of this batch was 36 kg of Shanlinxi High Mountain Oolong that was harvested last spring. The leaves had to be specially sourced from a farmer who was willing to put the time and effort into oxidizing the leaves considerably more than a standard High Mountain Oolong. The oxidation level is essential for optimal results of extensive post-production roasting.

These leaves have undergone 8 separate roastings over a few months,

for a total roasting time of about 50 hours. Our friend first prepared his tea leaves for charcoal roasting by roasting them 3 times in a conventional oven roaster at low temperature of 80-100°C. This provides a "base" roasting level that the charcoal roasting can proceed from more efficiently. The leaves were then handed over to a specialized charcoal roaster who charges a standard fee, regardless of how many roastings are needed to achieve the desired results. In this case, it was 5 roasting sessions of incrementally increasing heat, starting from about 90° and finishing at 120°.

Our friend, who is a professional roaster himself and consistently achieves high awards in local competitions for his skill, keeps a chunk of Longan charcoal on display in his tasting room, acting as an air purifier as well as a symbol of a tradition that he is dedicated to representing. So much traditional knowledge and skill has gone into the making of this month's batch of tea — not to mention time and energy, that we feel it stands alone in representing the deep tradition that is alive and thriving here in the heart of Oolong Country in Taiwan.