

Tea Utensils

The bowls, water containers, kettles, and other items used in serving tea are collectively called *chadōgu*, meaning “tea implements.” The tea utensils used at a gathering may vary considerably depending on the tea school, the type of tea gathering, and the time of year. Even so, nearly all procedures for serving matcha-based tea involve the following items.

Tea Bowls (*Chawan*)

The host at a tea gathering prepares matcha in a bowl called a *chawan*. Prior to the sixteenth century, most tea bowls were elegant pieces imported from China. By the early sixteenth century, Japanese tea masters had begun to prefer the more rustic look of vessels from Korea (*kōrai*). These bowls, particularly the type called *ido-jawan*, exemplified an aesthetic of tranquil simplicity (*wabi*) that would come to dominate the practice of tea. In fact, some of today’s most priceless tea bowls began as inexpensive dishes for daily use. Over the course of the sixteenth century, Japanese kilns began to produce their own tea ware, which Sen no Rikyū and his student Furuta Oribe (1544–1615) helped to popularize.

Tea bowls often have a “front” side that is determined by the bowl’s form, shape, or primary decoration (anything from an intricately painted flower to an eye-catching aspect of the glaze). Tea bowls come in a great range of shapes, designs, and sizes. Those intended for use in winter are often thick-walled and deep, to maintain the warmth of the tea. Summer bowls, on the other hand, are often broad and shallow so that the tea cools more quickly.

Containers for Thin Tea (*Usuchaki*)

At tea gatherings, guests are served what is called “thin tea” (*usucha*). The powdered green tea, or matcha, used to make *usucha* is stored in an airtight vessel until just before the gathering, when an appropriate amount is transferred to a tea container called an *usuchaki*. When making tea, the host scoops matcha powder from the tea container into the tea bowl.

Tea containers can be highly decorative and are often made of lacquered wood. They come in a variety of shapes, the most common of which is called *natsume*, meaning “jujube fruit.” This name reflects the vessels’ similar shape: rounded cylinders that taper at the bottom.

Tea Scoops (*Chashaku*)

Tea scoops are thin, flat utensils with a gentle curve on one end. They are used by the host to scoop matcha powder from the tea container into the tea bowl—usually two scoops per serving. Most tea scoops are made of bamboo, but they may also be made of other types of wood, ivory, tortoiseshell, or even precious metals.

Tea Whisk (*Chasen*)

Prepared matcha is often whisked with a bamboo tea whisk to give it a frothy, airy texture. After adding matcha powder and hot water to the tea bowl, the host whisks the mixture briskly until the powder is completely dissolved and foam gathers on the surface of the tea.

Different tea schools prefer tea whisks with straighter or more rounded tines.

Uraku's Tea Utensils

Oda Uraku had one of the most valuable collections of tea utensils of his day, and much of it is now kept in museums and private collections. After Uraku's death, some prized items were entrusted to his friends, and some were given to Kenninji Temple to pay for future memorial services. Uraku also created his own tea utensils, including nearly a dozen *chashaku* tea scoops.

Tea utensils are often given poetic names that reflect their creators or famous owners. One *ōido*-style tea bowl that bears Uraku's name inspired a particularly fierce bidding war in 1937. It is now in the Tokyo National Museum.

Another of Uraku's utensils was a valuable *chaire*, a type of tea container used in making thick tea. Uraku gave the *chaire* to Toyotomi Hideyori (1598–1615), Hideyoshi's heir, in 1612. After Osaka Castle was attacked and burned in 1615, Tokugawa Ieyasu ordered the *chaire* recovered from the ashes, and it became an heirloom of the Tokugawa family.