

Wazuka Tea Processing Facility

After Wazuka farmers gather the season's tea harvest, they bring the fresh green leaves to processing facilities, where they are transformed into the tea enjoyed by consumers worldwide. The same leaves can be used to produce different types of tea—green tea, oolong tea, and black tea, for example—depending on how they are processed. In Wazuka, the tea leaves are primarily processed as *sencha*, the most popular type of green tea consumed domestically. This once involved time-consuming and labor-intensive hand rolling, but the majority of farmers now rely on machines for processing.

Though the process varies slightly depending on the producer and the type of tea, the Wazuka Tea Processing Facility uses machines to carry out the following steps:

Steaming

Freshly picked tea leaves are transferred from a receptacle onto a conveyor

belt that moves them into the steamer (*mushiki*). This process must be performed quickly to deactivate enzymes and preserve the antioxidants that make green tea such a healthy drink. Inside the machine, the leaves are spun and steamed at a high temperature and then immediately cooled by fans. The leaves can be steamed for varying lengths of time and spun at various speeds. This process is the most important for determining the flavor, aroma, and color of the final product.

Rolling

Four machines are used to replace the traditional hand-rolling process.

From the steamer, the leaves are put into the rough rolling machine (*sojuki*) and tossed by long metal teeth to remove excess moisture. In the next rolling machine, the “leaf-crushing” *junenki*, a large weight applies pressure to the leaves as a brush continuously gathers them in a circular motion, breaking down the cellular membrane and evening out the color. Next, moisture is further removed in the *chujuki* machine, where heat is applied evenly in a closed cylinder. The final rolling machine, the *seijuki*, rolls the tea in one direction over curved bamboo surfaces using large

paddles as “hands” to create the characteristic needle-like shape of dried Japanese tea leaves.

Drying

The tea leaves are further dried in a drying machine (*kansoki*) immediately after rolling in order to preserve their shape. Trays containing shallow layers of rolled leaves are inserted into the machine, which uses heat and air to complete the drying process. This step reduces the moisture content of the freshly picked tea leaves to less than 5 percent, which helps preserve the tea for several months.

Access

Walk approximately 5 minutes from the Wazukayama-no-Ie bus stop. Turn right at the large intersection with the Lawson convenience store, and the tea processing facility is on the left beside the Wazukacha Café. Parking is available for cars and bicycles.