

Wazuka Tea Processing Facility

After farmers gather the season's tea harvest, they take the freshly picked green leaves to processing facilities where they can be made into the types of tea that consumers around the world are familiar with. The same leaves can be used to make green tea, oolong tea, black tea, and other types, depending on how they are processed. In Wazuka, tea is primarily processed as *sencha*, the most popular type of green tea consumed domestically. Farmers used to process their tea independently on their own property, but various machines were invented to simplify and speed up operations. Eventually, facilities where access to the machinery could be shared were established, greatly streamlining the once labor-intensive method of hand rolling.

Wazuka was one of the first major tea-producing regions to mechanize in the early 1900s. Many of the machines still in use today are decades old and no longer manufactured for sale. This makes them both valuable and difficult to replace, and proper maintenance is crucial to prevent them from breaking down.

The Wazuka Tea Processing Facility is primarily used to process leaves for submission in domestic tea competitions.

Tea Steamer (*Mushiki*)

A conveyor belt carries freshly picked tea leaves into the steamer to deactivate enzymes and preserve antioxidants. Inside the machine, the leaves are spun and steamed at a high temperature and then promptly cooled by fans. Depending on the desired tenderness and flavor, the leaves can be steamed for varying lengths of time and spun at various speeds.

Rough Rolling Machine (*Sojuki*)

The steamed leaves are put into this machine and tossed to dry them. The long metal “teeth” help move the tea leaves to avoid clumping.

First Rolling Machine (*Junenki*)

This machine applies pressure without heat, “crushing” the leaves with a weight while a large brush gathers them in a circular motion. This breaks down the leaves’ cellular membrane and evens out their color.

Second Rolling Machine (*Chujuki*)

This round of rolling uses heat to evenly dry the leaves as they are rolled in a closed metal cylinder.

Final Rolling Machine (*Seijuki*)

Once the other machines have removed as much moisture as possible, the final rolling machine 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 Machine (*Kansoki*)

After the rolling is complete, the tea leaves are promptly dried further to preserve their shape. The leaves are arranged in a thin layer on trays that are inserted into the drying machine, which uses heat and air to finish the process. With this, the moisture content of the freshly picked tea leaves is reduced to less than 5 percent, which will help keep the tea fresh for several months.