



Matcha  
抹茶

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# matCha

Bluffing and brewing tea for two.



**Players:** 2  
**Ages:** 10+  
**Time:** 20mins



The Japanese tea ceremony is a tradition centred on spirituality and servitude. Preparing and presenting a beautiful *matcha* (tea) for your guest is the ultimate expression of culture, ceremony and respect.

In *Matcha*, players attempt to collect the utensils they need to perform a tea ceremony by matching cards on the table by their number (1-4) or suit (tea, water, bowl & scoop.)

Cards are played secretly, and sometimes it will be to your advantage not to match at all.

With just 18 cards and an assortment of tea utensil tokens, *Matcha* provides plenty of strategy for players who must decide when and where to play their cards to the table.

***Block and bluff to brew the best matcha possible!***

抹茶

## Contents

18 tea ceremony (*otemae*) cards:



8 mat (*tatami*) cards:



(including two blank mats for players to store tokens)

and 35 wooden utensil (*chadogu*) tokens:

- 7x leaf (green)
- 7x bowl (red)
- 7x water (blue)
- 7x tea scoop (yellow)
- 7x tea whisk (white)

## The tea ceremony cards

**Matcha** is played using an 18-card deck of tea ceremony cards (*otemae*) cards. Each card is numbered (1-4) and is of one of four suits (denoted by a colour and icon.) Each card also displays a reminder of how the cards are ranked (by numbers and suits.)



## Card rank

When playing cards in **Matcha**, it is important to understand their rank in relation to each other. Cards are ranked both by number and suit. Ranking, however, is more like a loop than a straight line.



So... A 4 is ranked higher than a 3, which is higher than a 2, which is higher than a 1, which is "higher" than a 4.

And... Green (*matcha*) is ranked higher than red (bowl), which is higher than blue (water), which is higher than yellow (tea scoop), which is higher than green, etc.

In other words... A 4 is higher in rank than any other numbered card except a 1, and a 1 is lower in rank than any other card except the 4. (And likewise for the suits.)

The "0" cards have no rank or suit. They are lower than all the other cards and will never make a successful match (further explained below).

## Setting up the game

First, gather the six mat cards. Place these on the table between the two players in three pairs - each pair must include a card with numbers on it and a card with the four suit icons on it. The mat cards should be placed with their numbers/icons on the outer edge.

Second, remove the two "0" cards from the tea ceremony deck and shuffle the remaining sixteen cards. Deal the sixteen cards into two face-down piles - one pile with six cards and one pile with ten cards. Add the two "0" cards to the deck with ten cards and shuffle it well. From this deck, deal five cards face-down to each player to form their starting hands for the game. (A player's hand should remain hidden from the other player at all times.) The two cards left over from this deck should be set aside - they will not be used - and neither player should know what is on their faces.

Lastly, before playing a round of *Matcha*, the deck of six cards dealt to the table are turned over one at a time and placed on each of the six mat cards. These cards should be placed so that the numbers and icons on the mat cards remain visible. (See image.)



Two extra mat cards are included for players to store the tokens they earn during the game.

## Playing sets and rounds

A game of *Matcha* is played in sets of three rounds each. During every round, players will take turns either playing a card to the table, or passing. After three rounds are completed, all the tea ceremony cards (including those played to the table by the players, the six cards placed on the mat cards, and the two cards set aside during set-up) are shuffled together to start a new set of three rounds as per the set-up rules.

*Matcha* is played until one of the players has collected enough utensils to perform a tea ceremony. There is no predetermined number of sets, rounds or turns. As soon as a player is able to declare a victory, the game will end immediately.

During a round, players may place cards on their side of the table, next to the tea ceremony cards on the mat cards. Each round, players can only play cards to the current pair of mat cards. For the first round, players can only play cards next to the pair of mat cards on the dealer's left. For the second round, the pair of cards in the centre are used. For the final round, the pair of cards on the dealer's right will be used.



At the start of every set of three rounds, players can see all the tea ceremony cards on the mat cards and can plan their future moves accordingly, but they cannot play or remove cards to or from any past or future round's pair of cards.

## Taking a turn

Each round is made up of an indefinite number of turns. The round only ends when both players have passed. Starting with the dealer for the round, players will take turns, playing a card next to one of the two available tea ceremony cards or passing.

### **Playing a card face-down to the table:**

On their turn, players may place one of the cards from their hand face-down next to one of the two tea ceremony cards for that round. By doing so, the player is declaring that they are trying to match that card with their face-down card. Players can only have one card face-down next to any of the tea ceremony cards at any one time.

To make a match, the face-down card must have either the same number or suit as the tea ceremony card. Each round, one tea ceremony card must have its number matched, the other can only have its suit matched as denoted by the mat it is sitting on. (See the image on the next page.)

In this instance, the cards marked **X** are both trying to match the **number** on the tea ceremony card (2). The cards marked **O** are trying to match the **suit** on the tea ceremony card (green).

The required match is shown on the mat cards.



### **Passing:**

On their turn, a player may declare that they are passing for this round. A player who passes cannot take another turn until the next round of the game. When both players have passed, the current round ends and the face-down cards played that round are resolved.

### **Resolution of a round**

During the resolution phase of the round, face-down tea ceremony cards are revealed and chadogu (tea equipment) tokens are awarded to the players. If both players had played a card next to the same tea ceremony card then both players' cards are flipped over to show their faces. The player with the best match receives a token of the same type of chadogu as designated by the suit of the tea ceremony card they had matched. Some tea ceremony cards must be matched by number, others by suit, but both cards will award the player with the best match a *chadogu* token of the type represented by the tea ceremony card's suit.

Only one card will earn the matching chadogu token. If both players' cards match the number-match tea ceremony card, the card of the higher ranking suit is the best match. If both players' cards match the suit-match tea ceremony card, the card with the higher ranking number is the best match. If only one player's card matches the tea ceremony card it is automatically considered the best match. Players should refer to the card rank diagram on the tea ceremony cards as a reminder for what card is the best match in each situation.

If, after the player's cards are revealed, one of the players had played a card that DID NOT match the tea ceremony card - whether by number or suit as required by the tea ceremony card in question - that player receives a white tea whisk (*chasen*) chadogu token.

However, if BOTH players played a face-down card that did NOT match the tea ceremony card in question then neither player receives ANY chadogu token.



*In this example on the left, both players had matched the tea ceremony card's number (2) but the top player had the best match because their card's suit was higher in rank. (Green ranks over blue.) The top player wins a red tea bowl (chawan) token.*



*Likewise, both players matched the correct suit on the second card (matcha/green) but a 1 is higher in rank than a 4 so the top player wins the green matcha chadogu token.*



*Which token is won is determined by the suit of the tea ceremony cards on the tatami mat cards.*

*In this situation, on the left, the top player matched the tea ceremony card's number (2) and earns a red tea bowl (chawan) token. The bottom player did NOT match the tea ceremony card and therefore, earns a white tea whisk (chasen) token.*



*With the cards on the right, both players did not match the tea ceremony card's suit and so neither earned any chadogu token.*



Therefore, the only way to obtain tea whisks is by NOT matching a tea ceremony card when your opponent DID match that same tea ceremony card. Remember that the "0" cards NEVER match any card.

If only one player placed a card next to a tea ceremony card (the other player passed instead), the player receives a chadogu token of the type designated by the suit of the tea ceremony card WHETHER OR NOT the card they played matched it. The card is considered a match, whether or not it was (ie: a tea whisk is NOT awarded in this instance.) In this situation, the played card is NOT turned over. The card played should never be revealed; at least not until after the set of three rounds is complete.

If neither players play a card next to a tea ceremony card then no chadogu token is awarded to either player at the end of the round.

Once both tea ceremony cards are resolved and utensils are awarded, play continues to the next round.

*Here, in the situation on the right, the bottom player did play a card but the top player did not. The bottom player automatically earns a green tea (matcha) chadogu token as designated by the tea ceremony card. Their played card is not revealed, however.*



## At the end of a set

If a player has not won the game by the end of a set of three rounds, the player who was not dealer for the previous set of rounds becomes the dealer for the next set. They collect all the tea ceremony cards together - including the two previously removed from the game - shuffle them, and deal the cards out as mentioned previously.

If a player finished the set of three rounds with one or more cards still in their hand they may keep those cards for the next round. Before being dealt their new hand they must decide if they will keep any cards. If yes, the dealer will only deal enough new cards to that player to give them a hand size of five cards (you can never have more than five cards in your hand.) If the player(s) choose not to keep them, their leftover hand cards are shuffled together with all the others before new hands are dealt.

## Winning the game

**The game is won in either of two ways:**

- A player earns their fourth chadogu token of a single type, or,
- A player earns at least one of each of the five different types of chadogu tokens.

The game ends at the end of a round in which a player has met one of these winning conditions.

It is possible for both players to have met one of the winning conditions at the end of the same round. In the case of a tie, the winner is the player with the most chadogu tokens of the higher suit - whoever has the most green matcha tokens wins. If this is a tie, then the player with the most red tea bowl tokens wins, and so on down the suit rankings. If the game is still tied, further round(s) should be played until one player has more of a higher ranking chadogu token.

## Strategy

It is important for players to note that for every set they will only have 5 cards to play with 6 tea ceremony cards to match. This means that at least once in a set of three rounds they will have to leave one tea ceremony card without a face-down card played to it.

Remember that when only one player places a card beneath an tea ceremony card, their card remains face-down for remainder of the set. What is left face-down in these situations is vital in order to put doubt into your opponent's mind.

Table talk is allowed. For example, a player may say whether they have played a matching card to the table (without showing its face) when in reality they have played a non-matching card (or vice-versa) in order to bluff their opponent. Remember that to win the game, players must NOT match tabletop cards at least sometimes!

Matcha is an extremely tight game. Much of the time, both players will near a winning condition at the same time. Every move counts!



## Resolution chart

### ***Both players play cards next to a tea ceremony card...***

- Best match wins chadogu token of tea ceremony card's suit.
- Lower ranked match wins nothing.
- Non-matching card wins tea whisk token.
- If both cards are non-matching, neither player wins a token.

### ***One player plays a card next to a tea ceremony card...***

- That player wins chadogu token of tea ceremony card's suit.
- The card remains face-down.

### ***Neither player plays a card below an tea ceremony card...***

- No chadogu is awarded to either player.

### ***To win...***

At the end of a round, a player needs either four of one type of chadogu token, or one of each of the five types.