A FREE GUIDE FROM REFRESHMENTS.SI

The Home Café Starter Guide.

A short, practical plan for a coffee or tea corner that fits a real US kitchen — not a showroom, and not a shopping list you have to finish.

Edited from Gold Hill, Oregon · 2026



HOW TO USE THIS

Keep it small enough that you'll actually use it.

This guide is eight pages on purpose. You do not need a café on the counter. You need one reliable morning path, a first shortlist, and maybe one bottle or mug that makes the habit easier to keep.

I edit refreshments.si from Gold Hill, Oregon, for US kitchens. Everything mentioned here is already on the site, with live Amazon links so you can see current prices and pack sizes. You do not have to buy anything to use the methods in these pages. A jar, a kettle, and tea you already own will work.



What this is

A calm way to choose between coffee and tea, a simple cold-brew method, and a short list of drinks and gear that earn their space.

What this isn't

A ranked "best of" list, a review roundup, or a set of fake scarcity claims. If something is a good fit, I'll say why. If you can skip it, I'll say that too.

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STEP ONE

Pick one morning path, not five appliances.

Before you think about machines, answer three quieter questions: How many mugs do you make before 9 a.m.? How much counter can you honestly give up? And do you want a small ritual, or do you want to press a button and leave the kitchen?

The “right” setup is the one that still has a place on the counter in March. Choose one path below and ignore the rest for now.

1 Coffee, the convenient way

A Keurig or a Nespresso Vertuo is for mixed tastes, small patience, or a house where several people want different cups. K-Cups and Vertuo capsules are not interchangeable, so pick the system whose pods you actually want to keep buying. A variety pack is enough to start.

2 Coffee, the slower way

Pour-over or a home espresso machine is for people who like the process. The OXO Brew Single Serve gives you a clean filter cup without standing over a kettle. The Breville Barista Express has a conical burr grinder built into the top, so you do not need a second appliance if you want to learn espresso.

3 Tea, including matcha

A box of bags and a kettle is a complete setup. English Breakfast in the morning, hibiscus or a bedtime blend later. Buy a small pouch of ceremonial matcha only if you want a whisked bowl or a latte you make yourself. A regular green tea bag and a tin of matcha are not the same cup, even though they come from the same plant.

If you are still choosing, the full walk-throughs live on the site: **How to choose a coffee maker** and **Matcha vs green tea**, at refreshments.si/guides.html.

COFFEE

A first coffee shelf that isn't a cubby of leftovers.



Start with one everyday coffee and one backup, not six bags "to compare." Finish what you open. These are the ones I would put on a first shelf — each is on the coffee aisle at refreshments.si/coffee.html.

For a pod machine

The Original Donut Shop 100-pack is a diner-style medium roast that lasts. If regular K-Cups taste thin, Peet's Major Dickason's Blend holds a darker cup. Vertuo owners can start with the 30-count Nespresso variety pack and find a favorite before buying a bigger box.

For later in the day

San Francisco Bay Swiss Water Decaf is water-processed, so an evening pot still tastes like coffee. Death Wish Dark Roast is there if you want something louder and higher in caffeine — I would not start with it while you are still learning a new machine.

For beans or a moka pot

Lavazza Espresso Barista Gran Crema is a forgiving 2.2-pound bag — nutty, low-acid, easy to live with. Lavazza Super Crema is the sweeter, hazelnut-leaning bag I would run through a home espresso grinder first.

For a weekday shortcut

NESCAFÉ Gold Espresso Intense is instant, and I mean that kindly. It shakes into a creamy iced espresso when the good beans are in the freezer or you are not at home. No grinder, no ceremony.

A quiet tea corner, and a jar of cold brew.





Tea, without a ceremony you won't keep

Twinings English Breakfast (100 count) is the dependable morning bag, strong enough for milk. FGO organic hibiscus is tart, caffeine-free, and especially good over ice with lime. Celestial Seasonings Sleepytime Extra is the chamomile-and-valerian wind-down a lot of people already know.

If you want to try matcha, start with Tenzo's small organic pouch, not a large ceremonial tin. If you keep reaching for it, Naoki's First Spring Blend is a gentle first-harvest tin that works with water or oat milk. Harney & Sons White Peach Matcha sachets are the middle path: a hint of matcha, no whisk required.

Cold brew in a jar, overnight

You do not need a special tower. Use about one cup of coarsely ground coffee to four cups of cold, filtered water. Stir, cover, and refrigerate 12 to 18 hours. Strain through a paper filter or a pour-over cone. What you have is concentrate. Dilute with water or milk over ice, usually about one part concentrate to one or two parts liquid, then adjust.

Lavazza Gran Crema makes a smooth first pitcher. Swiss Water Decaf works in the afternoon. If you do not want to wait overnight, brew a hot OXO pour-over over a glass of ice, or shake NESCAFÉ Gold with cold water and milk. Taste before you sweeten — a lot of people need less sugar than they expect.

The longer versions are on the site: refreshments.si/matcha-vs-green-tea.html and refreshments.si/cold-brew-at-home.html.

THE REST OF THE COUNTER

Cold drinks with less sugar, and a snack that earns its drawer.



“Zero sugar” on a can can mean four different things: no sweetener at all, a diet-style sweetener, a soda alternative with fiber, or a fermented tea that started sweet and finished dry. Read the ingredient list, not just the front.

If you want bubbles, not sweetness

La Croix Lime is still the clean benchmark — carbonated water and a hint of lime, nothing to sweeten it. Waterloo is louder in aroma. Spindrift uses a little squeezed fruit juice, so it tastes brighter and lightly tart.

If you miss soda, or want a lift

OLIPOP Lemon Lime is a prebiotic citrus soda, not a seltzer. CELSIUS Wild Berry and Bloom’s Shirley Temple are zero-sugar energy drinks with 180–200 mg of caffeine — morning or pre-workout, not a late-day sip. Liquid I.V. sugar-free sticks are for hydration, which is a different job.

For a desk drawer: ALOHA’s peanut butter chocolate chip bars eat more like food than chalk (14g plant protein, no stevia). Barebells Cookies & Cream is the closer-to-candy option with 20g protein. Royal Dansk butter cookies still belong next to afternoon tea. Kind almond bars are the coffee-break middle. None of these is a “best bar.” They are honest fits for different cravings.

A fuller label walk-through is at refreshments.si/zero-sugar-drinks-explained.html. The shelves themselves are at /drinks.html and /snacks.html.

GEAR

Only the pieces that earn the counter.



Most home cafés fail by accumulation. Buy the machine that matches the path you already chose, and one bottle you will actually rinse. Leave the rest.

Coffee makers

Keurig K-Classic — three brew sizes, a 48 oz tank, no touchscreen. For mixed tastes and weekday speed.

Nespresso Vertuo Pop+ by Breville — a tiny footprint, ready in about 30 seconds, espresso or an 8 oz mug.

OXO Brew Single Serve — paper-filter pour-over with a water tank, no gooseneck ritual.

Breville Barista Express — a conical burr grinder already on top, plus a steam wand. This is the one to choose if you want to learn espresso and do not want a second gadget.

Bottles and everyday fizz

Owala FreeSip 24 oz — a hidden straw and a chug spout, with a lid that locks in a bag. A practical commute size.

Stanley Quencher 40 oz or YETI Rambler 40 oz — all-day sizes that still fit many car cupholders.

Hydro Flask 24 oz Travel Tumbler — Oregon-born insulation, a flexible straw, no metallic aftertaste.

SodaStream Terra — if you drink a lot of seltzer and are tired of hauling cases. One machine, if you will actually refill it; otherwise keep buying cans.

A blender only belongs here if you make smoothies most days. The NutriBullet Pro is the travel-cup version; the Vitamix E310 is the lasting counter machine. Don’t buy both on a hopeful Saturday.

Live listings: refreshments.si/gear.html

A FIRST SHORTLIST

If you only added five things this month.

This is a starting shortlist, not a kit you must buy as a set, and not a ranking. Mix and match with what you already own.

1. One coffee or tea you will finish — a variety pack of pods, a bag of Lavazza, a box of Twinings, or a small pouch of matcha.
2. The maker that matches that choice, only if you don't already have a way to brew. Otherwise, skip this line.
3. A bottle or tumbler you will rinse the same day — Owala 24 oz is the size I suggest for most commutes.
4. One unsweetened or low-sugar cold drink you actually like, so "something fizzy" does not default to a regular soda every afternoon.
5. One desk snack that doesn't disappoint you — a bar, a tin of cookies, or crackers, not all three at once.

Where to go next

The aisles and the longer guides are at **https://refreshments.si/**

Coffee, tea, drinks, snacks, and gear: /coffee.html, /tea.html, /drinks.html, /snacks.html, /gear.html. Buying guides and this PDF: /guides.html. If you joined the pantry list, you'll hear from me about once a month — a short note, not a blast.

Thank you for reading. I hope your counter stays a little clearer than it was last month.

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