

Tea

Tea is made from the dried leaves of *Camellia sinensis*, the tea plant, and comes in 3,000 varieties. Their names often reveal the districts where they were grown. For instance, Darjeeling tea comes from India and Formosa oolong tea from Taiwan.

The legend of tea begins in China 5,000 years ago. An emperor, a smart guy, ruled that drinking water should be boiled as a health precaution. During his travels one summer, servants were boiling water for him to drink when dried leaves from a bush blew into the water. The infusion turned the water brown, which piqued the emperor's interest. He tried it, the story goes, and liked it.

Though tea was discovered some 5000 years ago, our knowledge of tea and its vast contributions to human health was very limited. In the last 15 years a lot of scientific research was conducted which raised our awareness of tea and its health benefits. As a result, the consumer base for tea has expanded and generated an increase in demand for more information about tea. And now the educated consumer is generating an increase in demand for premium quality tea.

Today, some consumers know the difference between tea sold in supermarkets and whole-leaf gourmet tea, but some are still unaware of the facts about tea. The teabags that you see on the shelves of your local supermarket are made of the lowest grade tea — fannings also referred to as dust. Fannings are tiny particles that break off when the tea leaves are processed. They do not give much flavor nor have much aroma nor do they possess all the beneficial qualities of whole-leaf tea.

Tea, as most of us know, comes from the leaves of *camellia sinensis* plant. There are four main types of tea — white, green, oolong and black — and many different varieties within each category, making a total of more than 3,000 teas from around the world.

The difference between these 4 types is the processing method.

White tea is produced in very limited quantities in China and Sri Lanka. The new buds are plucked before they open and left to wither and then dried.

Green tea is unfermented tea. The leaves are dried and then heat-treated to stop any fermentation/oxidation.

Oolong tea is semi-fermented. The tea leaves are first dried in direct sunlight, and then shaken to lightly bruise the edges of the leaves. Then, they are spread out to dry until they turn slightly yellow; the edges turn reddish as the chemicals in the bruised leaf react with the oxygen. This fermentation/oxidation process (12%-20%) is stopped after 1 ½-2 hours by firing.

Black tea is fully fermented tea. The leaves are picked and spread out to wither until limp enough to be rolled. Next the leaves are rolled and spread out in cool and humid conditions for 3 ½-4 ½ hours to absorb oxygen. The chemical change that takes place in the leaf particles turns them from green to coppery red. And finally the fermented/oxidized leaves are then fired, which turns them black.

The Chinese Tea Ceremony evolved over many years and the Chinese fell so in love with tea that at one point there was a law forbidding the export of tea from China.

The Portuguese navigators were the first to bring tea to Europe, and it was the Portuguese Princess Catherine of Braganza, who married Charles II in 1662, who brought the first tea to Britain in her royal dowry. Tea began with a bad reception, as the clergy of the time said that since it came from heathen country it was a sinful drink! Doctors said it was unhealthy to drink and, even worse, the brewers lobbied the government saying that tea might replace ale at breakfast! A wonderful excuse for the government to tax tea, and in 1689 they did, making tea vastly expensive overnight.

If a lady could afford to buy tea she could certainly afford to have a craftsman make a small chest in which to keep it. Later, these became more elaborate and were called **Tea Caddies**. The tea was like gold dust and the lady of the house kept the key of the caddy on her belt, only offering this precious commodity to very important visitors. She, herself presided over the kettle, the measuring of the dry leaves with a caddy spoon, and the making and serving of the tea. That is how the British tea ceremony started.

It was not until 1784 when William Pitt reduced the tax on tea that the British became the nation of tea drinkers that they are today. Teapots grew larger and more ornate as Britain entered an age of elegance and social life changed. And when, in the late eighteenth century, afternoon tea started to emerge as a meal, the lady of the house presided over her teapot. The seventh Duchess of Bedford is credited with having invented afternoon tea, and certainly it became very fashionable in late Georgian and early Victorian times. Craftsmen responded to the demand and all the lovely things we associate with afternoon tea stem from that period.

Tea Protocol Today

Afternoon tea, which is having a great revival today, can be served any time from 2:00pm to 5:00pm. It is still correct for the hostess to make and pour the tea. If two different teas are being offered, the most important of the lady guests is asked to pour the second pot. Milk must always be offered, but never cream, and if milk is taken, it should always be put in the cup first. Sliced lemon should be available and sugar should be on the table for those who must have it.

Facts about Tea

In recent Dutch studies it was found that men who drink black tea which contains catechins are fifty percent less likely to die of ischemic heart disease. This occurs when our arteries become clogged and are unable to work as they should because of them becoming narrow.

We now know that drinking a half to two cups of tea per day may promote fertility by inhibiting abnormalities in our chromosomes. In a recent test 250 women drank as little as half a cup of tea per day and their pregnancy rates were double those who did not.

A remedy for puffy eyes is to lie in a horizontal position and place either a tea compress or wet teabag over both eyes and leave for about 20 minutes. The puffiness around the eyes will amazingly vanish and your eyes will look and feel brand new.

One way to rid your refrigerator of unpleasant smells is to place one or two used tea bags somewhere within the fridge. The next day any bad smell will be gone!

A substance called Tannic acid which naturally occurs in tea is said to help in the battle against warts. Apply a wet tea bag to the infected area for about 15 minutes three times daily and the wart will slowly begin to shrink until it eventually disappears.

It is known that men in Asian countries who consume green tea have very low instances of prostate cancer. Many prominent researchers are convinced that this is due to green tea containing many powerful antioxidants and preventative anti-cancer agents.

In recent Australian studies CSIRO scientists found that the occurrence of skin cancer in laboratory mice was greatly reduced when they were given black tea. It is thought that polyphenols which are very strong antioxidants and are contained in the tea are the most likely reason for this phenomenon.

Tea-Smoked Chicken

It's important to have a good kitchen exhaust fan for this recipe as it does "smoke". We use chicken wings, but 3-4 lbs. of thighs work as well.

16 chicken wings
3 cloves of garlic, chopped
1 tbs. grated fresh peeled ginger root
1 tbs. honey
3/4 c. low-sodium soy sauce
1/2 c. cream sherry
3/4 c. brown sugar
1 c. loose-leaf Lapsang Souchong tea
Sesame seeds as garnish

Cut wing tip off drumstick end of wing and slice through the wings. Wash and pat dry. In a blender place chopped garlic, grated ginger root, honey, soy sauce and sherry and process only 20 seconds. Pour marinade into a 9"x13" baking pan and coat the chicken wings. Cover pan and refrigerate at least two hours, rotating wings at least one time. Line a heavy cast iron or steel roasting pan with heavy-duty aluminum and sprinkle the sugar and tea on the foil. Place a cake or wire rack in the skillet, and arrange the chicken wings on top. Cover with lid or more aluminum and turn the burner onto high, cooking chicken for 30 minutes. Resist the urge to lift off the pan, and keep chicken covered for 20 more minutes. To make their appearance browned or crisper, coat with a little sesame oil and put in a preheated 450-degree oven for about five minutes. Serve with sprinkled sesame seeds atop. Great with peanut or mustard sauce.

Wild Rice with Tea

This recipe is from Cordon Bleu-trained chef Nat Litt, owner of The House of Tea in Philadelphia, (800) 923-8327. He offers nearly 200 gourmet teas and tea blends from around the world. When in the city of brotherly love, stop by at 720 South Fourth Street.

1 tsp. good-quality oolong or black tea leaves
1/2 chopped tomato
1 tsp. each: chopped red, yellow and green bell peppers
1 tsp. chopped onion
1/2 chopped onion
1 tsp. thyme
1 bay leaf
1 tbs. butter
2 c wild rice
4 c chicken stock
2 oz. demi-glaze (concentrated chicken stock), optional. If eliminated, use additional chicken stock.

Sweat tomato, peppers and onion in butter until tender. Add wild rice, tea leaves, spices and chicken stock to cover. Add demi-glaze. Bake in covered casserole dish in 350-degree oven for 45 minutes. Remove bay leaf, fluff and serve.

Orange Pekoe & Grand Marnier SoufflÈ

From Pastry Chef Alan Gontowski of the Four Seasons San Francisco, created in honor of Samuel Twining, OBE (Officer of the Order of the British Empire), using Twinings Orange Pekoe. Chef Gonowski served this soufflÈ in molded chocolate tea cups, made in cupcake tins with handles of rolled chocolate attached. It is just as attractive (and delicious) made in individual ramekins.

1/2 c water
2 tbs. Grand Marnier
1/2 c heavy cream
10 tbs. granulated sugar
3 eggs, separated
2 Twinings Orange Pekoe tea bags

Whip heavy cream with 2 tbs. sugar and refrigerate. Separate eggs and add 4 tbs. of sugar to the yolks and whip until thickened and light yellow in color. Set aside. Whip egg whites to a light foam and slowly add the remaining 4 tbs. of sugar, whipping until stiff peaks are formed. Heat water and steep tea bags, and leave to brew for four minutes. Squeeze bags to draw out all the flavorful liquor of the brewed tea. Place tea on the stove and bring to a boil; simmer at medium heat uncovered until reduced two-thirds. Remove from heat and cool. Place yolk mixture in a double boiler with tea liquid and temper over warm water until the tea liquid reaches a ribbon stage. Pour into a large mixing bowl and fold in egg whites, then fold in chilled cream. Add Grand Marnier and pour entire mixture into a souffle mold, ramekins or chocolate cups. Refrigerate.