

Time for Tea

Denis Scott, WVU Extension Agent, Morgan County

Tina Cowger, WVU Extension Agent, Marion County

Julie Tritz, WVU Extension Agent, Wayne County

*Black tea
is the most
common
type in
the Western
world.*



Camellia sinensis plant

History of tea: Do you know your “histor-tea?”

The origin of tea dates to 2737 BC China. That’s nearly 5,000 years! According to Chinese legend, the Second Emperor, Shen Nung, discovered the world’s most popular beverage. Believe it or not, the wind carried dried leaves from a camellia bush directly into a pot of boiling water. Following this happy accident, tea served medicinal and religious purposes for many centuries. Buddhist monks engaged in a regular tea ceremony as a way to focus on peace and simplicity.



In 1600, Queen Elizabeth I founded the East India Company as a means to acquire some Eastern luxuries. This opened the doors to leaves from *Camellia sinensis* plant. The world’s fascination with tea quickly spread because of the far reach of the British Empire.

Two major American tea events happened in the early 1900s. At the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, tea vendor Richard Blechynden was exhausted from selling hot tea during the summer festival. In an attempt to speed up sales, he dropped some ice into a cup of hot tea. The combination was a hit and iced tea was born. The second discovery was made by Thomas Sullivan in 1908. Sullivan was selling tea samples to New York restaurants in individual bags. He quickly learned that the restaurants were using the samples without extracting the tea from the bags.

– continued –

Around the world with tea culture

Throughout Asia, people partake in tea ceremonies that differ largely in levels of formality. The Japanese have a complex and formal tea ceremony. In Korea, it is called *darye*, which simply means “etiquette for tea.” In Africa, tea is made not only from the camellia plant but also from herbs and spices. In Morocco, green tea is mixed with mint, sugar, and boiling water. In Somalia and Ethiopia, key ingredients include black tea, cardamom, cloves, and some honey. England’s take on tea – consisting of black tea, a touch of milk, and maybe sugar – spread to former British colonies. The term “afternoon tea” is credited to Anna Maria Stanhope, Duchess of Bedford, who felt hungry with a “sinking feeling” around 4 p.m. In contrast, a “high tea” was different. Working families would come home and have a meal of meats, breads, pickles, cheese, and tea. The table was “high”; hence a “high tea.”

Know the types “to a tea”

- Black tea is the most common type in the Western world. It is noted for its full, bold flavor and its pairing with sweets and creamy foods. Brew black teas in fully boiling water.
- Green teas have undergone less processing and have a much lighter flavor. Research shows a link between drinking green tea and a reduced risk for heart disease as well as several cancers.
- White tea is scarcer and more expensive than other teas. The flavor is light and sweet.
- Oolong tea is known as “the connoisseur’s tea” because of its distinct flavors and special aromas. Studies indicate that it aids in weight loss by increasing metabolism.

Home-grown teas

Technically, varieties of tea originate only from types of *Camellia sinensis*, an evergreen shrub found in tropical areas. Since the term “tea” has also come to mean aromatic beverages made

from the vegetation of other kinds of plants, you can grow your own teas. Many different plant parts, including leaves, stems, seeds, and roots, can be used to make herbal teas.

Commonly grown plants in West Virginia suitable for teas are basil, bergamot, fennel, feverfew, lavender, lemon balm, lemon verbena, mint, rose hips, sage, thyme, and chamomile. Chamomile, a favorite among herbal teas, is often found in blends. It is an annual so you should replant each year. Dry its small daisy-like flowers to brew a tea with a pleasing taste reminiscent of apples. Research has shown that chamomile has stress-reducing properties, so steep, enjoy, and . . . relax!

Ethiopian Tea

Ingredients

Black tea bags

15 to 20 cloves

15 to 20 cardamom seeds

4 cinnamon sticks

Honey to taste

Directions

Boil the cloves, cardamom seeds, and cinnamon sticks in about 6 cups of water. Let steep for 3 to 5 minutes. Place one black tea bag in a mug along with a touch of honey. Pour boiled spices into a mug.* Let contents steep for 3 more minutes. Remove tea bag and enjoy.

**If desired, use a tea strainer to keep the spices out of the mug.*

2011

Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Director, Cooperative Extension Service, West Virginia University.

FH11-269

