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Tea Time

WHETHER STRAIGHT FROM THE KETTLE, BREWED ON THE PORCH OR SERVED ICY COLD—THIS IS THE HOTTEST BEVERAGE UNDER THE SUN

—By Joanna Pruess
and Neva Cochran

You don't have to be a trend spotter to see that tea—hot or iced—is everywhere. Across the country, restaurants, cultural venues and retail shops serve premium teas, while supermarkets, convenience stores and vending machines are stocking bottled tea. According to the Tea Association of the USA, the number of Americans who will drink tea today is about 154 million. (That's half of us.) And in 2010, for the first time ever, more tea was imported into the United States than the United Kingdom.

From Dutch New Amsterdam to Hipster America

Tea was introduced to America in the 17th century when the Dutch established New Amsterdam. After the settlement was claimed by the British and renamed New York, English tea traditions became fashionable. By 1765, tea was the most popular beverage in the colonies. A decade later, the American Revolution began over “taxation without representation,” and tea was cast aside in favor of coffee. Interest in tea gradually returned, and by 1898, coffee and tea consumption were about neck-and-neck, according to W. H. Ukers' *All About Tea* (The Tea and Coffee Trade Journal Co. 1935).

Early 20th-century innovations had profound changes on America's tea habits. Thomas Lipton purchased tea estates in the British colony Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) so he could offer more affordable tea in his 300 grocery stores. He also began blending and packing his own tea in New York. Meanwhile, amid an oppressive heat wave at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904, Englishman Richard Blechynden decided to sell his tea iced to sweltering attendees. And in 1908, Thomas Sullivan unintentionally invented tea bags when he sent his imported tea to clients in

small silk sachets, which they used to brew the beverage.

Today's upswing in American tea consumption is widespread. And while appreciation for tea's cultural tradition has been supported by British, Eastern European, Asian and Middle Eastern immigrants, “Our tea renaissance is fueled more by an awareness of health that has lapped over ethnic boundaries,” says James Norwood Pratt, author of *New Tea Lover's Treasury* (Publishing Technology Association 1999). “Chai is now as American as the taco or pizza.”

Today's Tea Trends

For many consumers, their introduction to tea is at their supermarket with brands like Tetley, Luzianne and Lipton, according to Peter F. Goggi, executive vice president of the Tea Association of the USA. “As they get older, they not only drink more tea, but they are likely to branch out to different varieties,” says Goggi. “As you go up the pyramid, the cost goes up exponentially.”

Indeed, at the high end, tea elitists support some pretty fancy habits, and the market for teas costing hundreds of dollars per pound—occasionally per ounce—is growing.



Teabag or Teaball?

Some tea purveyors and buyers claim the “fannings” used in inferior tea bags may turn water tea-color, but they are merely tea dust and won’t brew as a full-flavored tea. Not always so, says Peter F. Goggi. “Fannings and dust command very good prices at auction and are prized for their ability to deliver a thicker mouth-feel and stronger brew.” Good teas are available in tea bags, and less desirable teas are available in loose form. The size of the leaf does not matter—only taste determines quality. As for health, in a study comparing five brands of tea brewed in-bag vs. out-of-bag, removing the tea from the bag resulted in a higher total antioxidant content. In addition, the maximum antioxidant capacity using loose tea was obtained after two minutes compared to 10 minutes with tea bags. Another study found that tea’s flavonoid content depended on the tea variety, weight and, to a lesser extent, the brewing technique. That said, even though loose tea has higher antioxidant levels, tea brewed with bags still provides significant amounts.

Ten years ago, Harney & Sons Fine Teas offered 100 different teas; today it sells more than 300 kinds. “Besides supermarket tea sales, the specialty market is where the money is,” says Pratt. “Until 20 years ago, there was almost no ‘specialty market’—no Harney & Sons, no Republic of Tea, no Tazo and no chai and green teas.”

Today, specialty teas include subcategories, from “flowering tea” (red *mudan* or green *mudan* tea leaves tied into small bundles with dried flowers that, when steeped, bloom into beautiful shapes) to *Pu’er* (also called “dark tea,” which undergoes microbial fermentation to produce a musty tasting tea).

The latest tea trend superstar is white tea. Originally from the Fujian province of China and known for centuries only in China and Japan, white tea focuses mainly on the bud. The “white” color (the buds can also be silver or golden) comes from the bud’s “hairs” (known botanically as “pubescence” and reminiscent of the leaves of the African violet).

Herbal tea products—which, strictly speaking, are not tea since they are not from the *Camellia sinensis* plant—also have spiked in sales. From white to oolong, green and black, one factor driving this beverage trend is wellness. According to the Tea Association of the USA, 76 percent of tea drinkers are aware of the health benefits of tea, especially compared with other beverages.

Brewing Up Health Benefits

Ever since 2737 B.C., when Chinese legend says leaves from an overhanging *Camellia sinensis* plant fell into Emperor Shen Nung’s cup of boiling water, tea has been recognized by cultures around the world for its capacity to soothe, restore and refresh. Far from being an apocryphal promise, tea has been lauded for an array of potential health benefits—from reducing cancer and heart disease risk to improving dental health to boosting weight loss.

The strongest evidence is on the side of heart health, attributed to the antioxidants in tea. Flavonoids in both black and green tea prevent

Stats on Steeping

- Ready-to-drink tea (canned/bottled and refrigerated) is nearly half of the \$7.8 billion U.S. tea market.
- Retail supermarket sales of tea passed \$2.15 billion in 2010.
- In 15 years, the number of tea shops in the U.S. jumped from 200 to more than 4,000 (not counting coffee shops that also serve tea).
- 76 percent of current tea drinkers are aware of the health benefits of tea, especially compared with other beverages.

Source: Tea Association of the USA



oxidation of LDL-cholesterol (or low-density lipoprotein cholesterol), reduce blood clotting and improve widening of blood vessels in the heart. Studies that looked at the relationship of black tea intake and heart health reported decreased incidence of heart attack, lower cholesterol levels and significantly lower blood pressure.

Support for tea's cancer prevention benefits is less compelling. It has been suggested that antioxidant polyphenol compounds—particularly catechins—in tea may play a role in preventing cancer. However, a 2007 review reported that with the exception of colorectal cancer, studies related to black tea and other cancers were extremely limited or conflicting. In contrast, studies related to colorectal cancers showed either no relationship or a protective effect of black tea at intakes of 1.5 cups or more per day. Conclusions from a National Institutes of Health review of tea and cancer say that both clinical trials and epidemiologic studies of tea and cancer prevention have been inconclusive.

In 2010, Japanese researchers reported at least one cup of green tea per day was associated with significantly decreased odds for tooth loss. Other studies have suggested tea may lower the pH of the tooth surface, suppressing the growth of periodontal bacteria. A more

likely reason for tea's anti-cariogenic effect is its fluoride content. Tea usually is brewed with fluoridated water and the tea plant naturally accumulates fluoride from the soil.

Evidence supporting tea as a weight-loss aid is based mainly on studies that used tea extracts (ECGC and other catechins, flavanols, polyphenols and caffeine). These results may not be directly applicable to brewed tea consumed in normal amounts. However, one study of oolong tea in elderly obese people concluded that tea could decrease body fat and weight by improving fat metabolism.

The caffeine content of tea varies widely depending on the kind of tea used and the way in which it is brewed. Typical levels for tea are less than half that of coffee, ranging from 20mg to 60mg per 8 ounces (compared to 50mg to 300mg in coffee). Studies found no negative effects on hydration with intakes of up to 400mg of caffeine per day (the amount in about seven cups of the strongest brewed tea).

Cooking with Tea

Taken from the teapot into the soup pot, frying pan or mixing bowl, tea is useful in creating elegant and easy-to-prepare dishes. Pulverize tea leaves into a powder and stir it into Lapsang souchong-flavored turkey meatloaf or green tea mousse. Infuse leaves in sugar syrup for green fruits in Jasmine tea syrup or add them to the boiling liquid for Japanese noodle salad with sugar snap peas. Including tea in one's seasoning repertoire is like adding another shelf of spices to your cupboard.

Joanna Pruess is author of Harney & Sons The Tea Cookbook: Inspired Flavors for Contemporary and Traditional Dishes (Kingsbridge Press 2011).

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RECIPE

EARL GREY-CRUSTED SALMON

- 1 orange, peel washed
- 12 juniper berries
- 2 Tablespoons Earl Grey or other black tea leaves
- ½ teaspoon black peppercorns
- ½ teaspoon ground mace
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons unsalted butter
- 1½ pounds center-cut salmon fillets with the skin left on, cut into 4 pieces, and patted dry
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tablespoon finely chopped flat-leaf parsley, for garnish

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Zest orange and reserve. Remove pith, slice orange crosswise and set aside. In a clean spice or coffee grinder, grind zest with the berries, tea leaves, peppercorns, mace and salt into a powder. It will be somewhat moist.

Melt the butter in a large, oven-safe skillet over medium heat. Season the salmon with salt and pepper to taste. Sauté the fish flesh side down until brown, about 5 minutes. Turn with a spatula, sprinkle on the tea-spice mixture and spoon the butter in the pan over the fish. Lay the orange slices on the fish. Bake in the oven until the salmon is just cooked, about 8 to 10 minutes. If desired, briefly run the skillet under the broiler to brown the oranges a little. Remove and sprinkle with parsley. Serves 4.

Nutrition Per Serving (214 g):
 Calories: 340; Total Fat: 20g;
 Saturated Fat: 7g; Trans Fat: 0g;
 Cholesterol: 90mg; Sodium: 370mg;
 Carbohydrate: 5g; Fiber: 1g;
 Sugar: 3g; Protein: 35g

