

Cozy Up to Tea and Steep the Benefits



By Beth Potter



The image of being wrapped in a warm blanket, hands cupped around a steaming mug of tea is definitely one of the comforting images of our long Canadian winter. It's no wonder Canadians alone drink more than seven billion cups of tea each year.

Tea is the second most popular beverage in the world. And that's great news on the health front. The latest research confirms tea's benefits for cancer prevention as well as healthy teeth, a healthy heart and keeping an active mind.

All teas come from the same plant, *camellia sinensis*. Teas are then classified in four major categories – white, green, Oolong or black. The color of tea is the result of the chemical changes that take place when the leaves are given time to oxidize before drying. The exception of course, being herbal and flower teas that are simply dried herbs.

The world boasts more than 3,000 teas. Some of the most unique and sought-after teas include Gyokuro, a delicate green tea (grown in shade in just three regions of Japan) that may be the most expensive tea in the world, selling for up to \$1,000 a pound. Pu-erh is a black tea from China's Yunnan province; its double-fermented leaves are pressed into balls or bricks, then aged in caves (sometimes for years) to achieve a musty, earthy flavor. Silver-needle jasmine, a prized white tea from China's Fujian province, consists of silvery, down-covered tea buds (picked over a few days in spring) to which jasmine blossoms are added for scent.

“The latest research confirms tea’s benefits for cancer prevention as well as healthy teeth, a healthy heart and keeping an active mind.”



Become a Brew Master

Tea brewing is not a complex craft to master but does require some attention to detail. Tea should never taste bitter or lack flavor. Follow these tips to ensure the perfect cup:

1. Use filtered water. Always put fresh water in your kettle.
2. Warm your pot. While the kettle water is heating, fill your teapot with hot tap water to preheat it. This helps the brewed tea maintain the proper temperature. Discard the water once kettle has boiled.
3. As soon as the water comes to a boil, remove it from the heat. Scientifically speaking, overheating reduces the oxygen content and causes the tea to taste flat.
4. Measure your tea. For loose tea, place approximately one teaspoon of tea leaves per cup into the pot or into an infuser placed in the pot. (The amount depends on the type of tea and personal preference.) If you don't have loose tea, use one tea bag per 1-2 cups, depending on the size of the bag and again, use your personal preference.
5. Steep your tea. Small leaves brew more quickly and are usually ready in two to three minutes; medium leaves in three to five minutes; large leaves in six. Tea bags will steep faster than loose leaves.
6. Keep your tea hot. Use a tea cozy to keep the tea at the proper temperature. There are two types of cozies: an "over the top" cozy sits over the pot and must be removed to pour tea; and a serving cozy wraps around the pot, leaving the handle and spout exposed for pouring. Both work equally well. Just don't cozy up a tea pot that still has leaves in it or the tea will taste bitter.
7. Add lemon, sugar, or milk. Add the sugar first, since the citric acid from the lemon will prevent the sugar from dissolving. There is a debate over whether to add milk to the cup before or after the tea; according to the British Standards Institute, milk should be placed in the cup first. Experts recommend not using cream, as it interferes with the taste of the tea.