



Scientific name: Camellia sinensis

Common name: Tea plant

Family: Theaceae

Origin: Southeast Asia, Sri Lanka and India to Assam and China

Cold tolerance: 24-26 F

Chinese saying:

Better to be deprived of food for three days, than of tea for one.

Yes, tea comes from a camellia! It is a small evergreen usually pruned back to shrubs in cultivation, with strong taproot giving rise to a surface. It has interesting white flowers with golden stamens in fall and winter. The plants are slow growing and best kept to a height of 4 ft. by pruning. Plant in a well draining soil in the sun or partial shade, or keep them in a container.

Tea is the second most commonly drank liquid on earth after water. It has numerous medicinal benefits mainly due to its antibacterial and antioxidant properties. Tea has been consumed socially and habitually by people for so long (since 3000 BC), that aside from the astringent taste and boost it provides, its medicinal properties are often over-looked. However, traditional healers have long believed that drinking tea is a means of prolonging life.

It has been known to inhibit the growth of cancer cells and support cardiovascular health. All types of tea come from the same plant. Different rolling and drying techniques can be used with the same plant to produce both green and black tea.

How to Make Tea

Plucking. Cut off twigs with 2-3 of the younger fresher leaves (first flush), then pull off the individual leaves. This also prunes the bush and encourages new growth. The best tea is made from freshly formed new leaves.

Withering. Lay the leaves out on a sheet of paper in a warm place for 24 hours to wither and lose about 40% of their moisture.

Rolling and Drying

Japanese Style Green Tea

Roll the leaves long ways as tightly as possible between both hands to produce long twists of whole leaf. Place on a sheet of foil in a warm oven (below 245 degrees) for a maximum of 5 minutes. This dries the leaf and stops further fermentation. Do not burn the tea!

Orthodox Indian Tea

Roll the leaves in a circular motion using both hands. Press together as hard as possible to crush and break the leaves. Put the leaves in a paper bag for a day or two to ferment and lose some of their "greenness" and to develop a drier tea character. Remove and stalk and stem, roll briefly, and dry on a sheet of foil in a warm oven (below 245 degrees) for a maximum of 5 minutes. Do not burn the tea!

Brewing. Both of these processing methods maintain the leaf size and produce a light tea with natural aroma. Place a few leaves in a pot, or Chinese style in a bowl, add boiling water and allow the tea to brew. Enjoy!