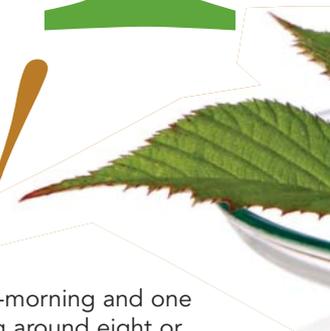


Get Your

TEA

BY GUY DEVIN, PHD

On!



There is an art and a science to drinking tea. Whether steeped (pun intended) in ancient traditions or modern day use, tea is a powerful part of our culture today. How and why did this ritual start? What possibilities are available to you as retailers? Depending on whom you talk to, next to water and coffee, tea is the third most consumed beverage in the world today. This provides retailers with a new and growing category for your stores—be it “regular” *camellia sinensis* white, green and or black tea, to the medicinal use of herbs as a tea.

His'tea'-ry

According to Chinese legend, tea was invented accidentally by the Chinese Emperor Shen Nong in 2737 B.C. Considered a scholar and herbalist, as well as a creative scientist and patron of the arts, the emperor believed that drinking boiled water contributed to good health. By his decree, his subjects and servants had to boil their water before drinking it as a hygiene precaution.

One summer day while visiting a dis-

tant region, he and his entourage stopped to rest. The servants began to boil water for the ruler and his subjects to drink. Dried leaves from a nearby camellia bush fell into the boiling water. The emperor was interested in the new liquid because it had a pleasing aroma. He drank the infusion and discovered that it was very refreshing and had a delightful flavor. He declared that tea gives vigor to the body; hence the concept of tea as a medicinal beverage was invented. However, it wasn't until about 300 A.D. that tea began to be consumed as a daily drink.

The daily drinking of tea for modern times started when tea was introduced to the European continent in the 1600s and then introduced to England in 1669. At that time only the aristocracy enjoyed the drink because a pound of tea cost the average British laborer the equivalent of nine months wages. The British began to import tea in larger quantities to satisfy the expanding tea market as it became less of a luxury. Tea quickly became Britain's most important item of trade from China.

Tea, or “high tea,” came about as the British would have only two main meals

a day—one at mid-morning and one later in the evening around eight or nine. Because the Queen was feeling weary and fatigued by mid-day, she wanted a little snack to hold her over until the late meal. To this day, teatime happens from approximately 3-5 p.m. in Europe. Our bodies seem to be looking for that little snack and/or bit of rejuvenation and our emotions want a time of reprieve from the busy work schedule around that time of day—hence the calm break of “a cuppa.”

For retailers, now more than ever is the time to really gain some education on how you, too, can use this ancient tradition to bond with your community over a fresh brewed cup of tea. Serving tea throughout the day is a great way to engage your clientele to take a breath and sip a bit of tea while shopping in your store.

When my wife and I ran our store, we had many people just pop in to get a taste of the daily healing brew which gave us time to build goodwill and engage our customers in a deeper conversation about their health and well-being. The primary focus of our herbal store was centered on the

“Better to be deprived of food for three days, then tea for one.”

— ANCIENT CHINESE PROVERB



medicinal qualities of the herbs as a tea. We built strong loyalty within our customer base and educated our customers as to the refined benefits of drinking their nutrients as a tea as opposed to swallowing a pill.

How to Make a Great Cup of Herbal Tea

The two primary ways to extract medicinal properties from herbs to make teas are *infusing* and *decocting*. Which process you'll want to try will be determined by the part of the plant used to make the tea. When working with the delicate parts of an herb—the leaves and flowers—you'll want to make an *infusion*. Making an infusion involves pouring hot water over the herbs and then steeping the herbs in the water. [Note that a *tisane* is generally described as an herbal infusion that does not contain any *camellia sinensis*.]

If you are using the tough parts of the plant like the roots, bark, twigs, seeds or berries, you'll want to make a *decoction*.

To make a decoction, simmer the tough parts of the herbs in boiling water. The process can also be used to reduce or boil down herbs to make a stronger preparation such as the base of a cough syrup. If a remedy combines leaves or flowers with bark or roots, make a mixed decoction/infusion for best results.

Infusions and decoctions allow you to release the healing properties of herbs into water. The value of many medicinal herbs lies chiefly in their volatile oils and the process to extract the medicinal properties need not be complicated. Just make sure you are familiar with the many different preparations.

Properties of the Medicinal Teas

Medicinal teas, infusions, tisanes or decoctions may be used for many different purposes, depending on which herb or herbal combination is used. Both fresh and dried herbs may provide a quick, easy and effective method of making a tea, which may be used medicinally.

Below are just a few examples of how

medicinal teas can be used to support a healthy lifestyle. There are many excellent herbal reference books to consult regarding specific uses—a few of which are listed below.

[Just so we are clear, the information presented below is for educational purposes only and is not intended to treat, cure, mitigate or diagnose disease.]

Calmatives. Calmative or nerve herbs have a relaxing effect on the central nervous system. Some calming herbal teas like valerian, hops, passionflower, mullein, skullcap and blue vervain can help you sleep, according to *Growing and Using Healing Herbs*. You should not drive or use dangerous machines after consuming tea made from any of these herbs.

Calming herbs like borage, chamomile, peppermint, catnip, peach leaves, red clover and St. John's wort may help soothe anxiety and nervousness and help promote sleep. Gotu kola, catnip, spearmint and peppermint may be helpful in easing stress and reducing mental fatigue.

Rosemary and St. John's wort may help with sadness, and mood according to *Today's Herbal Health*.

Pregnancy Support: It is generally noted that red raspberry, cramp bark and catnip may help reduce the risk of miscarriages and premature births due to uterine cramping. Catnip, spearmint, red raspberry and ginger may help to ease the nausea that accompanies morning sickness.

Childbirth: A tea made with blue and

(Continued on page 78)

(Continued from page 73)

black cohosh may cause labor contractions and may make childbirth easier. Parsley root and squaw vine may also be effective for stimulating labor contractions. It must be noted that pregnant women should *not* use these herbs unless they are near their delivery date.

Lactation Support: Blessed thistle, alfalfa, borage, fenugreek, hops, milk thistle, red raspberry and wild lettuce may increase milk supply in breastfeeding women. Marshmallow may help reduce breast inflammation. Those breastfeeding should avoid parsley and sage because they can cause milk production to stop.

Digestive Support: Carminative herbs like catnip, chamomile, chickweed, lemon grass, milk thistle, peppermint and spearmint may aid digestion by helping to reduce gas and stomach upset, according to *HolisticOnline*. Chicory may help ease stomach upset while marshmallow root and hops may reduce stomach acid.

Headaches: Bay leaf, peppermint and holy thistle teas may ease headaches caused by poor circulation. Ginger and goldenseal tea may help with sinus headaches. Catnip, borage, sage or

lavender teas may calm nervous tension headaches. Hops, lemon balm, peppermint, rosemary, St. John's wort and white oak bark may also help reduce headache pain.

Diuretic: According to *Today's Herbal Health*, alfalfa, chickweed and Joe Pye weed are mild diuretics, whereas *HolisticOnline* also recommends parsley and gotu kola.

Since teas are liquid, they are quickly and efficiently absorbed into the body. People who do not do well with taking capsules or pills may find that teas are an excellent way to introduce healing substances and energies into the body. Teas can also be used very effectively with children and the elderly.

These are just a few of the medicinal qualities and uses of herbs as teas. There are many more examples that you can find from the several quality herbal tea companies that you may carry. As we join together in the ancient ritual of drinking teas, we might just find that mystical space of healing within our mind, body and spirit that will spark us all to a more expanded state of consciousness and optimal health.

So, get in the tea game and get your tea on! **VR**

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Ask Dr. Joe (Continued from page 75)

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