

If Teapots Could Talk

Fun Ideas for Tea Parties

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Blue Sage Press

If Teapots Could Talk: Fun Ideas for Tea Parties

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Introduction

If Teapots Could Talk



An afternoon tea party is a great way to entertain your friends and family. Whether you're planning an elegant Victorian Christmas tea party or a wild and crazy "Mad-Hatter" tea party, your guests will enjoy the festivities.

Invented in the mid 1800's by the Duchess of Bedford in an attempt to stave off hunger pangs until the evening meal was served, afternoon tea quickly caught on in other English households, as well. The Duchess began a whole new trend that is still enjoyed today.

The very "civilized" practice of tea time forces us to slow our frantic, modern-day pace and take a brief time out to relax and enjoy the company of friends. Sharing delectable treats on our prettiest china shouldn't be considered a luxury that we rarely experience.

Using the tea time tips, recipes and party ideas included in this book, you can host a beautiful tea party to lavish on yourself and friends. So get out those teapots and create fond memories of lively conversation and laughter and fun, the way our ancestors have done for many years.

If only all those teapots could talk!



There are few hours in life more agreeable
than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as
afternoon tea.

~Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady*



All About Tea

Afternoon Tea Facts

Types of Tea

Preparing the Tea

Pouring the Tea



Afternoon Tea Party Facts



Afternoon tea is usually held between three and five o'clock in the afternoon. It is also called "low tea" because it's usually served in a sitting room where low tables (like a coffee table or tea cart) are placed near sofas or chairs.

Many Americans confuse the term "high tea" with an afternoon tea. High tea is actually a supper and refers to the height of the table (a dining table) where the food is served, with everyone seated around the table. High tea is served between five and six o'clock. Unlike the dainty treats served at an afternoon tea, this tea includes more hearty dishes, such as shepherd's pie.

An afternoon tea party is a festive affair, so plan to use your best dishes and teacups. Dainty tea sandwiches (both savory and sweet) and scrumptious cakes, cookies and pastries will delight the guests at your event.

Use pretty platters and tiered serving trays to present your tea time fare. And don't forget to include a sampling of scones, which are usually served with jam, honey and Devonshire or clotted cream.

On the following pages, learn how to make all the delectable treats you'll need for a proper afternoon tea, including the perfect pot of tea.



Types of Tea

All tea comes from the dried leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant. The leaves contain tannin (an astringent), caffeine (a stimulant) and an essential oil that gives it its own distinct flavor.

This flavor is also affected by the altitude where the tea is grown; the soil type and amount of rainfall and sunlight it receives; when the tea is picked; and how it is processed.

Tea falls into three basic categories, depending on how the leaves are processed:

- Black teas are the most popular in America. The leaves are crushed and then fermented before drying. They have a stronger flavor than the other teas.
- Oolong teas are only partially fermented and then steamed. Their leaves are a greenish-brown color, and the flavor is milder than black tea.
- Green teas are not fermented, just steamed, which preserves their green color and delicate flavor.

There are thousands of varieties of teas—which come mostly from Sri Lanka, India, Indonesia, Kenya and other East African countries. The tea you buy at tea shops or grocery stores can be a blend of 20 to 30 varieties, which are carefully selected by expert tea tasters to produce a particular quality and flavor that is unique to each brand.

A few of the more commonly known blends are: English Breakfast, a blend of strong teas from India and Ceylon; Jasmine, either green or a mix of black and green teas mixed with jasmine flowers; and Lapsang Souchong, from China, which has a smoky aroma and rich flavor.

Two of the most rare and expensive teas are: white tea, made in China from the buds of tea leaves, has a very mild and naturally sweet flavor; and Darjeeling, grown in the mountains of Nepal and known as the “Champagne of Teas”, has a golden color and muscatel aroma.

Scented teas are flavored with essential oils of flowers, fruits and spices. One example is Earl Grey, an afternoon tea favorite, which contains bergamot (orange) oil.

Storing Tea:

Always buy tea in small quantities and store it in an airtight container in a cool, dark, dry place, because it tends to absorb moisture and odors. Also, the unique essential oils that give the tea its flavor can evaporate more quickly when exposed to air.

Teatime Tidbit: Orange Pekoe is not a flavor of tea. The term “pekoe”, which means “little”, is simply a grade of tea leaf size that means “small”.



Preparing the Tea

To make a perfect pot of tea:

- Start with fresh, cold tap water in the tea kettle and bring it to a boil
- Use a glass or china teapot (never metal) for brewing your tea
- Fill the teapot with boiling water to warm it
- Pour out the water and place about 1 teaspoon of loose tea for each cup of water needed into the teapot
- Pour boiling water over the tea and steep for 3 to 5 minutes, depending on the type of tea and the strength desired

Tea that is brewed too long will have a bitter taste. Stir the water for more even brewing and then pour into cups through a strainer.

Teatime Tip: Take the teapot to the kettle on the stove when the water starts to boil. You want the water temperature to stay as close to boiling as possible. But don't let the water boil for a long time. It reduces the amount of oxygen in the water, and will make the tea taste "muddy".

Tea Balls:

Using a tea ball to hold the loose tea during the steeping process is easier than straining the tea into cups through a strainer. It does, however, take longer to brew the tea than using loose tea leaves. Using a tea ball will also allow you to remove the tea leaves from the teapot so the tea doesn't brew too long. Just remember to fill the ball only about half full, because the tea leaves will expand when they are wet.



How to Remove Caffeine from Tea

If you're concerned about the affects of caffeine, but can't find your favorite flavor of tea in a decaffeinated version, follow the steps listed below to remove most of the caffeine from any tea:

- Pour boiling water over the tea leaves
- Allow the leaves to steep for 30 seconds
- Pour out the water, saving the leaves
- Pour boiling water over the same leaves and steep for the desired amount of time

Teatime Health Tip: Drinking tea is a great way to get the recommended daily fluids your body needs. Tea also contains antioxidants, which are thought to be beneficial for the heart.

Tea Bags



Tea bags are another convenient way to make tea. They were invented in 1904 by a New York tea merchant who sent samples to customers in tiny, hand-sewn silk bags instead of tea tins. The bags were so popular he received hundreds of orders for them.

The tea particles in tea bags are much smaller than loose tea and therefore brew more quickly. If you allow the bag to steep too long, the tea will be bitter.

Don't squeeze the tea bag when removing it from the tea because it can release bitter oils into your tea. Never use a tea bag twice. The particles are too small to retain enough flavor to produce a second cup of tea.

If you can't find your favorite flavor of tea in the form of a convenient tea bag, make your own. You can purchase self-sealing tea bags on-line very inexpensively. (See ordering information in the index.) Simply fill each bag with one or two teaspoons of tea and seal closed with an iron.

Teatime Tip: To flavor your teabags, store them in an airtight jar with citrus peel, vanilla beans or cinnamon sticks.

Pouring the Tea



In most cases, the hostess pours the tea at her afternoon tea party, but occasionally, she might bestow the honor on a friend. Unlike serving coffee, tea is never poured several cups at a time because it cools very quickly. The person pouring the tea prepares each cup individually, according to a guest's personal preference.

When pouring the tea, first ask each guest if she prefers strong or weak tea. You should always keep a separate teapot filled with hot water to dilute strong tea.

Next, ask how many lumps of sugar she prefers, then whether she wants milk or lemon (never both). The lemons should be cut into thin slices – not wedges.

After preparing the guest's tea, hand the teacup and saucer to the guest and begin to prepare the next guest's tea.

The guests can help themselves to the tea party food, which is displayed on pretty serving platters. Be sure to provide appropriate serving pieces such as tongs or pie servers.

Teatime Etiquette: When attending a tea party, it's fun to dress up and wear gloves, but always remove your gloves as you enter the room. It isn't considered proper to shake hands, eat food or drink tea while wearing gloves.

Tea Recipes

Flavored Teas

Herbal Teas

Tea Blends





Flavored Teas

There are many flavored teas available in the form of loose tea leaves or tea bags at tea shops or your local grocery store that you can use for brewing the tea at your tea party. But it's also fun to experiment with different combinations of flavors to create a special brew for your event.

The recipes listed below will give you a few ideas.

Chocolate Tea

2 tablespoons black tea leaves
1 tablespoon cocoa powder
1 teaspoon dried grated orange peel
1/4 cup brown sugar, firmly packed

Add all the ingredients to a warmed teapot, along with 6 cups of boiling water. Stir and then steep for 5 minutes. Stir again and strain into cups.

Serve with milk, and provide additional brown sugar for your guests if needed.

Apple Tea

Black tea leaves
Clear apple juice
Sugar to taste
Cinnamon sticks

This tea is brewed using apple juice instead of water. Place 1 teaspoon of tea per cup of juice needed into a warmed teapot. Heat required amount of apple juice in a saucepan until boiling. Pour juice into teapot and steep for 5 minutes. Stir and then strain tea into cups. Serve with a cinnamon stick. Sweeten with sugar if needed.

Apricot Orange Tea

2 1/2 cups apricot nectar
1-1/2 cups orange juice
2 cups water
1 cinnamon stick, broken
8 whole cloves
2 tablespoons black tea leaves

Combine apricot nectar, orange juice, water, cinnamon and cloves in a medium-size saucepan. Heat mixture just until boiling. Add tea leaves to warmed teapot. Pour boiling juice mixture into teapot and steep for 5 minutes. Stir and strain into cups. Sweeten with sugar.

Teatime tip: Flavor sugar cubes for tea by storing them in a jar with whole cloves, vanilla beans or cinnamon sticks. You can also decorate the sugar cubes for a tea party with icing flowers to make them more festive.

Cranberry Tea

3 cups water
3 cups cranberry juice cocktail
1 cinnamon stick, broken
8 whole cloves
2 tablespoons black tea

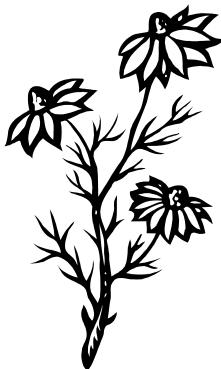
Combine water, cranberry juice, cinnamon stick and cloves in a medium sauce pan. Heat mixture just until boiling. Add tea leaves to warmed teapot. Pour boiling juice mixture into teapot and steep for 5 minutes. Stir and strain into cups. Sweeten with sugar.

Mulled Tea

5 cups of water
3/4 cup orange juice
1/4 cup lemon juice
8 whole cloves
3 cinnamon sticks, broken
2 tablespoons black tea leaves

Combine water, orange juice and lemon juice in a medium sauce pan; heat mixture just until boiling.

Add cloves, cinnamon sticks and tea leaves to warmed teapot. Pour boiling juice mixture into teapot and steep for 5 minutes. Stir and strain into cups. Sweeten with sugar.



Herbal Teas

Herbal teas do not contain tea leaves, and therefore have no caffeine. They are made from a combination of herbs, spices, citrus zest and flowers.

There are hundreds of possibilities for herbal teas and tea blends, and they're easy and inexpensive to make at home. You can create a tea blend from your favorite herb flavors or one blended specifically to make you feel energized or relaxed, or even to lift your spirits.

- Herbs for creating a relaxing tea are: lavender, sage, chamomile and rose
- For an energizing tea, use rosemary, peppermint and lemon
- For an uplifting brew, use bergamot, geranium, orange and rosemary

Many flavors of herbal teas are available at your local supermarket or tea shop in the form of tea bags, which are very convenient for enjoying this refreshing, caffeine-free beverage.

Teatime Tip: Chamomile tea is the perfect choice for bed time. It has a gentle flavor and contains a natural sedative to help you fall asleep.

Herbs have been used for thousands of years for brewing tea. In America, after the Boston Tea Party, when the colonists dumped all the black tea they owned into the harbor, they were forced to use herbal teas instead, calling them “liberty teas”. They brewed herbal teas from rosemary, lavender, thyme, sage, mint and lemon balm.

How to Make Herbal Tea:

To make an herbal tea, also known by the French term *tisane*, use one tablespoon of fresh herbs or one teaspoon of dried herbs for each cup of boiling water. Rinse the teapot with boiling water to warm it, drain the water and then add the herbs. Pour boiling water over the herbs and allow them to steep for 5 to 7 minutes.

Since herbal teas don't turn darker as they steep, as regular teas do, you need to judge the strength by taste rather than sight. Strain the tea into cups and serve.

If you don't have a local source for buying dried herbs, you can always order them on-line and have them shipped to your door. See the index for ordering information.

Note: Always make sure the herbs you use to make herbal teas are pesticide free and intended for culinary use.

Try the following herbal tea recipes or make up your own blend from your favorite herbs.