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Chapter 1

It's Time for Tea

Did you know that tea is the second-most consumed beverage in the world? Most think of coffee or even beer before tea, but they are wrong. Tea is second only to water.

Throughout history, tea has played an important role in politics, economics, and society. Whether picked up in a gas station cooler or sipped in a fancy tearoom with friends, this drink's steeped in complexity. So, let's take a closer look at what has become one of the fastest-growing industries as well as the second-most popular drink around the globe.

In this chapter, we consider just what makes tea so enduring and loved. Is it just its flavor, or is there more to it? We briefly look at the benefits of drinking tea, and then we head into a few practical issues to get you started on your journey into the world of tea. About a gazillion teas are out there, but we offer some recommendations for where to begin, and then we supply a handy guide for how many cups of tea you can expect out of a bag of leaves. Finally, we offer a few tips on how to best store your leaves. Oh, and we do want to welcome you to the communi-tea!

Understanding the Popularity of Tea

It is safe to say that nations were built and economies were structured on tea. Today, nearly *4 billion* cups of tea are enjoyed every day! That's more than *165 million* cups an *hour*! Imagine how many leaves are picked daily to bring you this amazing elixir.

Meeting tea drinkers the world over

In the United States, tea is mostly consumed cold and quickly, but it is still an important part of our culture. Whether at a backyard barbeque, given to us for a sore throat or upset tummy, or served at a fancy tea party, we all have had a cup at some point in our lives — for some of us, multiple cups a day.

In many places in the world, tea is so woven into the culture that businesses and homes must welcome you with a cup of tea, while in other countries serving tea is a ceremony with deep traditions and meanings. People on every continent have made tea their own.

So, whether you're guzzling a refreshing iced tea while driving to your kid's soccer game, or someone across the ocean is getting all dressed up for a special tea party, or another person is attending a traditional tea ceremony, we are all enjoying the same drink.

Seeing why tea is so popular

Just why is tea so popular? For one, the world of tea is incredibly diverse. Although “tea” may conjure up an iced black tea, you can find tea to suit any taste. Bold or subtle, toasty or vegetal, bitter or sweet, smoky, fruity, floral, simple or complex, you get the picture. Some teas explode with flavor when iced, and others brace your spirits on a bone-chilling rainy night. Some pair amazingly well with food, whereas others are meant for thoughtful sipping.

Further, tea gives you what's often called a “calm alertness.” Unlike the caffeine in coffee, which hits you quickly and sometimes hard, that same caffeine in tea is tempered by an amino acid that's unique to tea. In a cup of tea, you get the best of both worlds: that alertness of caffeine, coupled with a calm and relaxing focus.

On a deeper level, having tea together binds us socially. A boisterous night over tea cocktails fosters camaraderie among friends; a solemn tea ceremony may ground us. We offer comfort and support when we pour a cup of tea for a grieving friend. Simply holding a steaming cup of tea promotes well-being. When someone asks you if you want a cup of tea, they're extending hospitality and kindness at the very

least. If someone you love asks you that same question, you know that cup symbolizes empathy, connectedness, and love.

Discovering some benefits of tea



REMEMBER

There's a lot of media coverage these days about the health benefits of tea and why you should drink it. Although tea is a healthy alternative to high caloric drinks like soda or pop, it isn't a cure-all. Yes, tea can be an important part of a healthy diet and may indeed offer some benefits, but tangible physical effects are only now being defined and understood. However, preliminary results are exciting as we learn, for instance, how tea positively impacts our frame of mind, including outlook, mood, and our perception of others. There's hope that tea helps preserve cognition. In fact, so much research is being done that we dive deeper into the science in Chapters 13 and 14.

If you're an herbal tea fan, don't worry. We have you covered as well, with Chapter 15 devoted to current research on herbal teas.

Begin Your Tea Journey Here

Tea. It's as simple as boiling water, pouring it over leaves, taking a couple minutes to relax, and straining out the leaves. One cup of the perfect tea can hook you for a lifetime.

Tea knows no age

When I (Lisa) opened TeaHaus, my older son was two years old and my younger one was three days old — yes, I know, I'm crazy. They have both been drinking tea since, well, forever. I can remember giving my baby a little cooled ginger rooibos when his tummy was upset, and my older son would be so excited to get his favorite fruit tea in his sippy cup. On the other hand, my husband was forty-five before he started really enjoying tea. He remembers having it as a kid but only when he wasn't feeling well or when his grandma was visiting.

Meanwhile, Jill has finally gotten her decades-long-coffee-drinker husband into tea. Granted, he drinks only two black teas, one fruity black tea, and absolutely no green teas, but he *really* likes those three teas.



REMEMBER

Tea can be enjoyed by anyone at any age. Sure, some teas are better suited for kids (caffeine free), and sometimes it takes finding the one that you personally love, but tea is to be had by all.

Teas to try first



TIP

If you are trying to get into tea, you'll probably want to hold off on some teas. Lapsang souchong, Japanese green teas like sencha or matcha, and white teas may not be what you are expecting. You may want to ease into these teas after you're more accustomed to tea and its various flavors.

So then, where *do* you begin?

For many, their journey into the world of tea starts with something more familiar, like earl grey or a teabag from a box. Although teabags have gotten better throughout the years, they will never be what tea is meant to be. In this book, we focus on loose-leaf tea.

At our store, we have seven different versions of loose-leaf earl grey, one of which is our number-one-selling tea. In fact, three of our best-selling teas come from our earl grey collection, and they generally rank within the top ten teas every year, which speaks to their enduring popularity. Once you have a cup of high-quality loose-leaf earl grey, you will never teabag again.

Another commonly known tea is chai. This spiced and often sweetened tea is a popular starting point in coffee shops and cafes. Fruity flavored teas are another great entry tea, especially iced. Even as a tea sommelier, I never judge if someone's favorite is a pineapple-mango tea or a sweetened caramel tea. I like to look at these teas as gateway teas. You should always drink what you enjoy the most and then branch out every so often. You might find a new favorite.

Things to consider when picking a black tea is how strong and bold you want it, how much astringency (that dry feeling in your mouth) you want, whether you prefer a tea that is simply strong versus something that has layers of flavor, and whether you like earthy or smoky notes.

For a less intense black tea, there are plenty of options. Ceylon teas are full-bodied and brisk, but not overly so, and they have just the right amount of astringency. They are what many people think of when they envision black tea. Ceylon is great iced and works well with lemon, sugar, milk, and so on. Assam teas pair particularly well with food, so they can be nice with a snack or meal, and they hold up to a little cream and sugar.

If, however, you want a strong tea, breakfast teas are a good match — and you have a lot to choose from: Irish, Scottish, English, Russian, and East Frisian blends, among others. Every tea blender will use a different ratio of teas, so you may find that you prefer some breakfast blends over others. Yet, all of them are robust enough to stand up to milk and sugar. Just take care in brewing these teas so that they don't become bitter.

For coffee lovers who are used to deep and complex flavors, consider an Assam from India or the many pu-erh and Yunnan teas from China. Some wild-grown teas would also make this list. Although these aren't in-your-face bold like the breakfast blends, they are intriguingly full-bodied and multilayered in flavor.



TIP

Note that teas that have been processed by the cut-tear-curl (CTC) process (these teas are in tiny bits) will release caffeine more quickly than teas composed of intact or largely intact leaves, especially if those leaves have been tightly rolled. However, this isn't to say that you will get more caffeine overall. The caffeine issue is complicated, and we suggest you go to Chapter 11 for a comprehensive look at how it operates in tea.

To start your green tea journey, Chinese green teas are more common and recognizable, so they are often our first recommendation. Japanese teas tend to be grassier or “seaweed”-like in flavor, so, for some, it takes a bit getting used to. Often, people's first experience with green tea is with a sweet matcha latte in a coffee shop or the tea served at their favorite Asian restaurant. Green tea is as nuanced as black tea, but it may take a bit more time to find your favorite.

Oolong, pu-erh, some white teas, and other tea types can also be great first-time teas as well, but we often recommend starting with the basics when first *steeping* into the world of tea.



REMEMBER

If you caught Lisa's reference to rooibos in the “Tea knows no age” section, sharp eyes! In this book, we include both tea —made from the tea plant — and herbal tea. Rooibos is a type of herbal tea, as are fruit teas (check out Chapter 9).

If you aren't sure you're ready for tea, but want a healthy or caffeine-free beverage, we suggest you start with some of the many herbal teas available. Fruit teas, which consist of fruit and other herbals, are a terrific substitute for high-calorie juice. You can find just about any fruit you want, and they are usually fantastic iced. Low in sugar but filled with flavor, these are wonderful for everyone in the family. Kids generally love fruit teas!

Rooibos and honeybush blends are also both kid- and adult-friendly options. You can readily find fruity, floral, earthy, or other blends, so you're sure to find something you enjoy, and they are naturally caffeine free.

Where to buy your tea



REMEMBER

When shopping for tea, it is important to know how and where the store sources their teas. You needn't know the exact gardens or time of day your tea was harvested, but it is important to know that the tea store sources teas from gardens that go above and beyond to ensure the highest quality.

This is not to say that grabbing a teabag tea in the hotel lobby is a no-no, but buying quality loose tea is worth the extra penny. Plus, not all high-quality loose-leaf teas are expensive. A very high-quality loose-leaf breakfast blend may not cost much more per gram than a box of teabags at the grocery store. Single-estate, handpicked, and rare teas from small gardens may seem a bit pricey, but keep in mind that a 50-gram bag of tea can make 15 to 20 cups, and some teas can be brewed several times. A \$30 bag of tea that can yield 20 cups makes the per-cup price only about \$1.50, which is well under the cost of a hot drink at most cafes or restaurants.

How much tea to buy



REMEMBER

Tea may be sold by the ounce or gram. Most teas require about 3 grams (0.1 ounce) of leaves to make an 8-ounce cup, giving you the following general guidelines:

- » 50 grams (1.8 ounces) of leaves yields 15 to 20 cups of tea
- » 100 grams (3.5 ounces) of leaves yields 30 to 40 cups of tea
- » 200 grams (7 ounces) of leaves yields 60 to 80 cups of tea
- » 500 grams (17.6 ounces) of leaves yields 150 to 200 cups of tea



TIP

Remember that many leaves can be brewed a second time (or more), which doubles the number of cups you get!

Storing your tea leaves



REMEMBER

It is important that your tea is stored in an area free of moisture, strong odors, and light. For this reason, we recommend that you do not use glass jars. Although it is so tempting to stock up on teas when you go to a beautiful tea and spice store that has rows and rows of jars filled with teas and spices, remember that the teas (or spices) probably won't be of great quality because of how they were stored and displayed.



TIP

Metal tins are good if they have a tight seal but be aware that tins will absorb aroma so keep similar teas in each tin (for instance, if you've stored a smoky tea in a tin, keep that tin for smoky teas, or if you have an earl grey tin, keep it an earl grey tin).

So, now that we have your interest, let's steep ourselves with more knowledge about the amazing beverage known as tea!