

# The Little GREEN TEA Book

Questions & Answers  
about the  
Oldest Drink on Earth

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# Where does green tea come from?

It is said that the Buddha discovered tea when, fatigued and unable to concentrate, he chewed on the leaves of the tea plant and was refreshed.

Many such legends appear in ancient Chinese text, and for thousands of years tea has been the favorite drink of India, China, Japan and many other cultures.

Officially, the Second Emperor, Shen Nung known as the Divine Healer first discovered tea in China in 2737 B.C. In 350 A.D., the first description of tea appeared in a Chinese dictionary. Most of the world's green tea is grown in China.



# What other kinds of tea are there?



Tea comes in many forms, but all true tea is from the same kind of plant—*Camellia Sinensis*—which is grown in China and other parts of Asia and India. (Chamomile, mint and other herb “teas” are not tea in the sense that they are not parts of the tea plant).

Tea trees grow in bushy hedges that are usually about 2-4 feet high. (These plants should not be confused with the “tea tree,” *Melaleuca Alternifolia*, from which tea tree oil is extracted.)

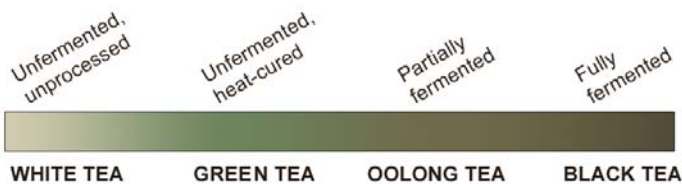
The most common forms of tea made from *Camellia Sinensis* are green, white, oolong and black<sup>10</sup>.



Many variations or “specialty teas” also exist, like darjeeling (from Darjeeling, in India) and pu’er, a Chinese “yellow tea” which is typically in brick format in a variety of shapes.

As a general rule, the darker the tea, the stronger the flavor and higher the caffeine.

Since most white tea is completely unprocessed, it is considered the healthiest of all teas, though its flavor is lightest.



# Why is green tea supposed to be healthy?

As most people have heard, tea—especially white and green tea—has been found to contain high levels of catechins, or ECGC. Human bodies produce unstable molecules called oxidants, or free radicals, which cause tissue damage and cancer. ECGC (epigallocatechin gallate) is a flavonoid that fights cancer at all stages<sup>7</sup>.

These antioxidants are many times more powerful than vitamin C or E, which are also cancer-fighting agents<sup>8</sup>. According to the National Cancer Institute, in lab studies green tea catechins destroyed cancer cells before cell damage occurred and inhibited cancer growth<sup>7</sup>. Still, deep investigations have only begun to understand the effects of flavonoids on the body, and in the end it is always the longevity studies that tell the tale.

In addition to ravaging free radicals and corralling metallic ions<sup>8</sup>, scientists have found that certain flavonoids have antihistamine, antimicrobial, memory- and even moodenhancing properties.

Studies published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition and Urology<sup>6</sup> show that green tea may also help weight loss by increasing metabolism and reducing sugar intake (if low-sugar iced tea is used instead of soda) and treat prostatitis, a painful urinary condition. People have also used tea extracts for facials and other topical applications for many years.



In fact, in China tea has been used for these and many other conditions—for millennia.

# What is good green tea?



Of course, preferences are matters of taste. But tea is a perishable item and, like coffee or cigars, it is ruined by air, which oxidizes it. Oxidation gives tea a bitter flavor, which is why most green tea available in the United States has a bitter aftertaste.

In general, the green tea available to Americans is a poor representation, especially with regard to the flavor and variety that pure green tea really can offer. The main problem with the vast majority of green tea brands available in America is that the tea itself is stale. Just like stale coffee, it loses its flavor and takes on a bitter aftertaste. The only thing that can salvage it is lots of sugar or added flavors to overcome the bitterness, such as mint, lemongrass, and other additives that mask the true flavor.

Why is all the tea stale? These days, it's probably mostly about convenience. Tea is put into bags, and the tea is typically powdered. Powdered tea, called *fanning*, is mostly the tea that's left over from processing, and is the cheapest tea. Since powdered tea steeps quickly in teabags, it is a convenient and inexpensive way to ship tea, and it makes it easy to use a portion for a cup. But powdered tea has an increased surface area, and therefore is immediately exposed to the air, which oxidizes it very quickly.

For this reason, the highest-quality teas are never ground; that would be like grinding your coffee months before you use it. The best tea is strictly processed, carefully packaged to be airtight, and used within 12 months of packaging. Staunch green, white and oolong tea drinkers mostly order it from the Internet, which can be tricky since even high-quality tea may be well over a year old already when purchased. With the growing awareness of whole tea, some stores are making an effort, but good tea is expensive and freshness varies.

# How to treat good tea

Here are the key elements:

1. Use whole tea. Do not use powdered tea bags. In studies we conducted using teabags versus whole teas, the powdered teabags disappointed every single time.



2. Find a convenient implement. Chinese steeping cups might be the easiest—a porcelain cup with a lid and a porcelain basket inside that you remove after steeping. French coffee presses also work well, and many great teapots are available online.

3. Use pure water. Tap water contains chlorine and minerals which can drastically affect the taste of the tea.

4. Infuse the tea with warm water, not boiling. Green and white tea should be in the 160-180 degree range, while oolong and black can be hotter—but does not need to be boiling. In China, tea is usually pre-steeped for about 60 seconds, which rinses and primes the leaves and preheats the cup or pot.

In addition to the quantity of tea you use in your cup or pot (Chinese brew it much lighter than westerners), the hotter the water and the longer you steep it, the stronger it becomes. Even high-quality tea can become bitter if steep for too long. 1-4 minutes is fine for most teas, according to how strong you want it to taste.

To make the best cold tea, use cold water. Instead of cooked tea, cold-brewing produces raw tea extract, a different and much fresher-tasting cold tea. (When making cold white tea, a pre-steeping rinse with hot water is recommended to avoid any bacteria, since white tea is not heat cured.)

# Resources Consulted



Learn more about tea and get further details and up-to-date research at these online sources:

1. Acupuncture Today - <http://www.acupuncturetoday.com>
2. American Medical Association - <http://www.AMA-assn.org>
3. Anresco Labs - <http://www.anresco.com>
4. Chinese Embassy - <http://www.china-embassy.org>
5. Environmental Protection Agency - <http://www.EPA.gov>
6. Food and Drug Administration - <http://www.FDA.gov>
7. National Cancer Institute - <http://www.nci.nih.gov>
8. National Institutes of Health - <http://www.nci.gov>
9. Psychology Today - <http://www.psychologytoday.com>
10. Dragon Pearl Whole Teas - <http://www.dragonpearltea.com>