

# HERBAL TEAS

## SOME HELPFUL TIPS FROM *K*ETTLEBY HERB FARMS.....

Herbal teas have been brewed for thousands of years, the earliest record is in 410 BC, Plato mentioned herbal teas in his writings. Seventy years later, Aristotle discussed herbal teas and his disciple Theophrastus wrote a detailed work called "On the History of Plants", which described the uses of herbs. Many of the early Herbals written, discussed the use of medicinal herbal teas, but many suggested that they be made with a vinegar and water combination, which probably explains their lack of popularity as beverages. The word tea originates from a dialect spoken in the Chinese port of Amoy where it was called *t'e*, and referred to *Thea sinensis* the tea plant from which the commonly known, black, green, and orange pekoe teas are produced. The pilgrims brought many plants and seeds to North America to make their favorite herbal teas which by this time were widely used in England. One of their favorites was Oswego tea, made from wild bergamot (*Monarda didyma*), which tastes very similar to Earl Gray tea. Herbal teas became popular after the Boston Tea Party, patriotic ladies banished imported tea from their tables and turned to domestically grown herbal teas-they called these beverages "Liberty Teas". Some of the combinations were made using, mint, balm, rosemary and sage and are still favorites today. After the Revolutionary War, the Americans imported tea directly from China and *Thea sinensis* became easily attainable and inexpensive again, although a few of the more flavorful herbal beverages were still used, most home-grown teas were returned to the medicine chest. It wasn't until about 25 years ago when many Americans began moving away from their usual diet of meat and potatoes towards a more ethnic and gourmet cuisine and the natural foods movement began a growing appreciation for herbs and their health sustaining qualities, that a real increase in the consumption of herbal teas began. An additional boost was added by the widely publicized fact that caffeine was not only an artificial mental and physical stimulant but also an addictive substance and was present in coffee, cocoa and *Thea sinensis* tea, but NOT in herbal teas. Today pre-packaged herbal teas hold a prominent place in most food stores and are available at many restaurants. They can be enjoyed for both their flavour and health benefits. When purchasing herbal teas the best quality are whole leaf teas that have not been ground into a fine mix, most herbs lose much of their flavour (essential oils) when finely cut and stored, and although these are convenient, whenever possible purchase loose tea.

It is easy to grow a number of herbs that are excellent for tea and you probably already have a number in your garden, such as mint, sage, lemon balm, lemon verbena, bergamot, chamomile, marjoram, rosemary, calendula, lavender, hyssop and some growing wild near by, such as red clover, nettle, strawberry leaves. With a few simple instructions and some experimenting for taste preferences you can create your own herbal tea blends.

**FRESH HERBS**-Gather your herbs, using scissors, when they are dry, preferable in the morning just after the dew has dried off (for leaves, flowers, green stems). Discard any damaged or discoloured leaves/flowers. If they need to be washed, rinse in cold water and dry off with paper towel. Remove any tough stems, bruise gently by squeezing them in a cloth and place in teapot.

**DRIED HERBS-LEAVES/FLOWERS/GREEN STEMS**-Make sure to collect your herbs at their peak, leaves before flowering, flowers as they open, and air dry in a warm place out of direct sunlight with good air circulation. Make sure herbs are dry before storing and store as whole as possible. Can also use a dehydrator. Remove any tough stems and gently crush before using.

**SEEDS**-Seeds must be gathered when they are barely ripe-as soon as they look brownish-because in a day or two the seeds will begin to drop, and if disturbed will fly in all directions. The best time to pick is in the morning after the dew is gone. Snip off the entire seed head and place in a paper bag to dry in a warm shady place. Grind before using.

**ROOTS**-Roots should generally be dug up in spring or fall, easier to find in the fall. Wash well and cut into small pieces before drying (impossible to cut once dry-like rocks). Dry in a warm shady spot, roots can take several weeks to dry thoroughly. Should be finely ground or powdered before use.

## **BREWING HERBAL TEAS**

1) **INFUSION**- This is the method to use for leaves, green stems and flowers of herbs. Place herbs in an infuser-ball/bag or directly in the tea pot. Use 1 tablespoon fresh herbs or 1 teaspoon dried herbs for each cup of water used. Poor boiling water over herbs, cover to prevent the essential oils from escaping and let steep 10 to 15 minutes. Strain if required and enjoy. Remove herbs after steeping....if you want it stronger use more herbs, not longer time.

2) **DECOCTION**-This is the method to use for dried seeds or dried roots. First grind plant material quite fine. Use 1 tablespoon of seeds or 15 grams of root for 500 ml of water. Add the herbs to cold water and place on the stove over medium heat, covered, allow to come to a boil and then turn down heat, cover and simmer seeds for 5 to 10 minutes or roots for 15-20 minutes or until the water has been reduced by 1/2(250ml) Strain and enjoy.

\*If you are using herbs that require both methods it is recommended that they be prepared separately before combining in the desired proportions.

\*If you wish to enhance the teas flavour use honey, cut fruit (orange, tangerine rind) or a bit of licorice root. Do not use sugar and do not add milk.

**ICED TEAS**-To make ice teas, prepare as you would for a brewed tea, then cool in the refrigerator and serve over ice with a sprig of lemon, lime, orange or mint.

**SUN TEA**-This method has been used for years by the American Indians. Using a large glass bottle, preferably one with a glass lid, fill the jar with water and add tea leaves or flowers, place in the sun for 3 to 6 hours depending on the strength of the sun, do not allow to boil. Strain and enjoy.

**CREATING TEA BLENDS**-With a little experimentation you can create some excellent blends. It is usually a good idea to start by tasting each herb on its own to determine which flavours appeal to you and which don't. We usually try to decide when we would like to drink this tea. Is it right after a meal? Is it for before bed? Is it for relaxing after a particularly stressful day? Or is one we can enjoy anytime of day and has some general health benefits such as a blood cleanser? From here we pick the main ingredient of the tea, then we try to pick other herbs that compliment our purpose and achieve the desired flavour. In a blend of 4 herbs we would generally start with 2 parts of the main ingredient and 1 part of each of the other ingredients, this would be done by the cupful and adjusted according to our personal preferences until we are pleased with the result and then it would be made up in larger quantities. Once you have created your blend, you can either store it in a glass jar (out of the light) or in a metal tin or small heat-sealable tea bags are available that are convenient and easy to take to work etc.

**TEA HERBS**-Here are a few suggestions of herbs that seem well suited to herbal teas:

anise-seeds

anise-hyssop-leaves, flowers

basil-lemon, cinnamon

bergamot-leaves and flowers

borage-leaves, flowers

calendula-petals

catnip-leaves

chamomile-flowers

dill-leaves, seeds

fennel-leaves, seeds

hibiscus-flower

hyssop-leaves, stems, flowers

lavender-flowers

lemon basil, lemon verbena, lemon balm-leaves

thyme-english and lemon-leaves and flowers

marjoram-leaves

marshmallow-leaves/flowers, roots

mints-orange, peppermint, ginger, lime-leaves

mullein-flowers, leaves

nettle-young leaves

pennyroyal-leaves, flower (not pregnancy)

raspberry-leaves

red clover-top leaves and flowers

rose-petals

rosemary-leaves, flowers

sage-leaves

strawberry-leaves

licorice-root

yarrow-leaves, flowers

**SOME SUGGESTED TEA BLENDS TO TRY... .....BUT GET CREATIVE!**

**STRESS RELIEVING:** 2 parts lemon balm, 1 part each of chamomile and lavender

**MORNING LIFT BLEND:** 2 parts lemon balm, 1 part lemon grass, 1 part peppermint

**DINNER BLEND:** 1 part bergamot, 1 part chamomile, 1 part any mint

**KID'S FAVOURITE** (great for sore throats/colds too!): 2 parts marshmallow, 1 part lemon balm