



Camellia sinensis also known as the tea plant in flower. The leaves are what is used to make tea. Photo courtesy of Leu Botanical Gardens Orlando, Florida.



Lemon Balm and Rosemary are seen here growing happily together. Both herbs can be used in tea. Photo courtesy of Leu Botanical Gardens in Orlando, Florida.

It's No Secret! Learn To Grow Your Passion For Herbal Tea

By Sheri Ann Richerson

Ah, the refreshing smell of spring is in the air once again. With spring comes the new growth of many herbs that are perfect for making tea. An advantage to growing these in your own garden is that you will know they are pesticide free. This provides, in my opinion, an added health benefit that you might not get from store bought herbs or herbal teas.

If you have not grown herbs in the past but enjoy herbal tea then this may be the year for you to try your hand at growing some. Not only are herbs easy to grow but they can be grown in containers if you do not have space in the ground to grow them.

Herbs such as mints, lemon or lime balm, scented geraniums, chamomile as well as a host of others are easy to grow, fragrant and make wonderful teas. The plant that tea comes from, Camellia sinensis, is also fairly easy to grow and harvest as well.

To make green tea simply pick young shoots from the Camellia sinensis. Be sure the ones you choose have two to three sets of leaves growing on them and allow the shoots to dry in the shade for a couple hours. Once the shoots are free from signs of any surface water, steam them on your stove in a vegetable steamer for about one minute. The final step before they are ready to be used is to dry them in a 250 degree F oven for twenty minutes to ensure there is no moisture in the leaf.

Camellia sinensis is also the plant used to make oolong tea. Here is the process that is used. It is slightly different than the process involved in making green tea. Pick fresh young shoots of the plant. Then spread the shoots out thinly over a cleared area of flat ground. It is best to cover the area with a mat or a towel to keep the leaves from making contact with the earth. The shoots are then wilted under the sun for 30 minutes to one hour, depending on the temperature outside. The leaves are then taken indoors, where they are left to wither at room temperature. This can take several hours. During this period the leaves are gently agitated by hand every hour. This process causes the edge of the leaf to turn red, and the moisture content drops about twenty percent. These controlled actions ultimately produce the unique aroma and colors found in oolong teas. The final step in making oolong tea is to place the young dried shoots in a 250 degree F oven for about 15 to

20 minutes to ensure that there is no moisture content left in the leaves or shoots.

Black tea also comes from the same plant, camellia sinensis. Again, look for tender young growth such as young shoots with 2 - 3 leaves. To remove surface water on the leaves and shoots, allow them to dry on racks for 10 to 20 hours. The purpose of this step is to bring down the internal moisture of the leaf to somewhere between 60% and 70% of the original moisture. This step makes the leaf more pliable which is important for the next step. Roll several shoots between your hands to bruise or crush them. Do this until the leaves darken and become crinkled. The leaves will turn a bright copper penny color. They should then be allowed to ferment by placing thin layers of leaves on a tray in a shady location. After two to three days the leaves are ready for oven drying. Place the leaves in a 250 degree F oven and allow to dry for 20 minutes. Once you have chosen which process above you will use and completed it then the leaves are ready for use or storage. To store, place in an airtight container in a dark place such as a cabinet. Do not crush the leaves until you are ready to use them in order to obtain the best flavor. This is true for all herbs. In addition to the camellia leaves that you will use in your homemade teas you can add in any combination of the herbs mentioned above. A general rule of thumb is to use ½ tea-spoon of dried herbs for every cup of water. This can be adjusted to your liking using more or less herbs. The herbs mentioned are only a few suggestions. Many other herbs make

great teas and are also good for you. For example, a great way to soothe an upset stomach is by making a tea with peppermint leaves in it. As with any home remedy if the problem persists, contact a licensed physician. However, for simple enjoyment, you can grow your passion for herbal tea right in your own yard or apartment.

Sheri Ann Richerson has over 20 years experience in newspaper, magazine and creative writing.

For more information visit <http://sheriannricherson.exotic-gardening.com>



Here you see the flower of the Camellia sinensis with an ant. Photo courtesy of Leu Botanical Gardens Orlando, Florida.