

Growing and Using Herbs for Tea

with **Alise Torgusen**

The word **tea** traditionally refers to the Chinese Tea plant, *Camellia sinensis*.

Herbal 'tea', also known as a *tisane*, is made by infusing various plant materials into water.

Herbal *infusions* involve using larger quantities of herb.

Herbal *decoction* refers to gently simmering plant material- bark, seeds, roots, tough grasses.

The term **herb** is generally used to describe any plant that can be used for a specific purpose.

Many herbaceous plants, shrubs, and trees provide material for tea.

Leaves, flowers, fruit, seeds, bark and roots are used.

Best harvested after dew has dried on a sunny day, early in the afternoon to ensure retention of essential oils.

Grow in a variety of garden conditions. Full sun, part shade, rich and poor soils, wet and dry soil.

Many do not require heavy fertilizer use.

Amending soil with rich compost before planting is encouraged.

If needed, fish and seaweed emulsion is recommended – avoid chemical fertilizers as they can alter the taste of herbs.

Side dressing with compost mid season can provide an extra boost to heavy feeders.

Mulch well to retain moisture, discourage dirt splash on plants, provide organic matter.

Flowering herbs are wonderful for attracting pollinators and beneficial insects.

Perfect addition to vegetable gardens!

Many can be grown in containers with proper care and fertilizer.

Woody herbs can be kept indoors year round with supplemental light, feeding and occasional re-potting.

Can be grown from seed, starting indoors in early spring, or directly sown into the garden.

Use sterile seed starting mix.

Supplemental light and heat is extremely beneficial when seeding indoors.

Annual Herbs – *Not hardy to Zone 4. Grow one season and die off with frost.*

Lemon Verbena- Must be started by soft stem cutting, does not develop seed. Full sun to part shade. Well drained soil to avoid root rot. Benefits from regular pruning.

Tulsi Basil (Holy or Sacred Basil)- Easy to grow from seed, or direct sown. Best grown in full sun. Pinch first few sets of flowers to encourage branching. Leaves and flowers for tea.

Lemon Grass- Stalks can be carefully separated from mother plant and rooted in water or moist soil. Full Sun. Rich, well drained soil. Keep soil evenly moist, avoid letting the roots dry out.



Stevia- Start early indoors. Gently press into soil surface. Full sun. Prefers very well drained, sandy/loamy soil. Avoid over-watering. Very little needed to enjoy its sweet taste!

Chamomile- Self seeding annual. Seeds need light to germinate, gently press into soil surface. Drought tolerant when established. Grows well in poor soil. Full sun to part shade. Keep harvesting mature flowers to encourage continuous blooms. Allow end of season flowers to go to seed.

Perennial Herbs – *Hardy to Zone 4*

Lavender (Munstead)- Can be tough to start from seed, soft stem cuttings most reliable. Full sun. Grows well in poor soil. Drought tolerant. Too much nitrogen can delay flowering. Protect in winter.

Catnip- Very easy to grow. Full sun. Tolerates most soils if well drained. Can become invasive- pinch flowers to discourage seed spread.

Lemon Balm- Full sun to part shade. Deer and rabbit resistant. Drought tolerant once established.

Mints- Experiment with different varieties. Does not create seed, divide plants, root cuttings. Full sun to part shade. Can tolerate wet soils. Can become invasive, remove runners to control its spread.

Roses (Rosa spp.) – Flower petals and hips (seed pods)

Bee Balm (Monarda spp.)- Leaves and flowers

Red, Black Raspberry (Rubus idaeus, Rubus occidentalis)- Leaves

Herbs can be dried for later use.

Bundle a few stems together and hang upside down in a warm, dry, well ventilated area until cracker dry or lay out on a screen.

Dehydrators can be used, but watch closely and avoid high heat as it can destroy oils.

Herbal tea can be made from fresh or dried plant material.

Amount of herb used varies upon taste preference.

Experiment with blending herbs! Add dried apple pieces to enhance flavor.

Herbal Tea Brewing Suggestions:

Heat 8 oz. (1 cup) fresh water to a boil. Remove from heat, pour over 1 T. dried herb or 1 small handful fresh herb. Keep covered to retain heat and essential oils. Let herbs steep for 5-15 minutes to taste (or more, if desired). Strain herbs and gently press out excess water. Enjoy herbal tea unsweetened, or add honey to taste.

Resources:

Mountain Rose Herbs- www.mountainroseherbs.com

Traditional Medicinals- www.traditionalmedicinals.com

Chestnut School of Herbal Medicine- www.chestnutherbs.com