



20,000 Secrets of Tea

**The Most Effective Ways to Benefit
from Nature's Healing Herbs**

Victoria Zak

An ancient Chinese proverb says: Better to be deprived of food for three days than of tea for one.

Tea has been a favorite beverage worldwide for hundreds of years. A cup of tea on a rainy evening can chase the chills away and a pot of tea shared among friends can lend an air of enchantment to an afternoon. But more than that, tea can treat a variety of ailments, and with this invaluable guide you can put the secrets of tea to work for you!

- Sage tea in the middle of the afternoon will make you feel like your day is just beginning.
- Peppermint tea eases pain, headaches, and is a general cure-all.
- Rosemary tea on your scalp can help to stimulate hair growth.
- Thyme tea, considered the most powerful antiseptic herb, helps to heal infections, infectious diseases, and septic conditions.
- Chamomile in your bath will totally relax you and do wonders for your skin.

And much, much more!

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TEA

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A DELL BOOK

Neither this nor any other book should be used as a substitute for professional medical care or treatment. It is advisable to seek the guidance of a physician or other qualified health practitioner before implementing any of the ideas or procedures suggested in this book that may affect your health. This book was written to provide selected information to the public concerning herbal tea remedies. Research of many of these herbs is ongoing and subject to interpretation. Although we have made all reasonable efforts to include the most up-to-date and accurate information in this book, there is no guarantee that what we know about these herbs won't change with time. The reader should bear in mind that this book is not intended to take the place of medical advice from a trained medical professional. Readers are advised to consult a physician or other qualified health professional regarding treatment of all their health problems. Neither the publisher nor the author takes any responsibility for any possible consequences from any treatment, action, or application of medicine or preparation by any person reading or following the information in this book.

This book is dedicated to Leona.

Acknowledgments



First, I'd like to say a heartfelt thank-you to my agent, Sally McMillan. I'd also like to thank my editor, Christine Zika; editorial assistant Caroline Sincerbeaux; and photographer Alex Garbarino and associate art director Marietta Anastassatos for their superb cover design. Special thanks for support to Donald Axinn, Shannon Banks, Stacey Chase, Tina D'Amato, Charles Facey, Rose Fidel, Tasha and Steve Halpert, Pat Klinzing, Claire Lehrman, JoAnn Mason-Quigley, Judith Podell, Cris Carlin Scheidt and Phil Scheidt, Sylvia Stickney, Peter Wash, Judy and Cliff Wagner, and Kathy Zak. I'd also like to thank all the herbalists and herbal gardeners who have kept the tradition of herbs alive throughout the generations.

“When I drink tea

I am conscious of peace

The cool breath of Heaven

rises in my sleeves, and

blows my cares away”

—CHINESE POET LOTUNG

Foreword

Introduction

Chapter 1 The Wonders of Tea

The history of herbal teas from the discovery of the first tea to their popularity on a global scale.

Chapter 2 Sympathetic Remedies

Down-to-earth methods for adding herbal treatments to your daily menu, with step-by-step instructions for using herbs as teas.

Chapter 3 The Bounty of Blends

A simple formula to help you make your own inspirational blends of herbal teas at home as well as fabulous recipes for bountiful blends, with guidelines to evaluate commercial blends.

Chapter 4 Teas and Specialties

A cornucopia of special uses for teas: teas to cut your sugar consumption, teas for slimming, healing waters for botanical baths, and suggestions for setting up a modern medicinal kitchen with herbal teas.

Chapter 5 Herbal Guide to Health

An A-Z guide to common health problems and health-oriented issues, followed by the herbal teas that are best used to treat them.

Chapter 6 A Modern Herbal Tea Garden

More than 100 herbs are treated individually, with their official names, descriptions of the plants, stories and lore, uses in history, studies that reveal their unique nature, cautions to consider, properties and values, and proper parts to use.

References

Resources

Foreword



The father of medicine—Hippocrates—was once quoted as saying, “Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food.” In the following piece of literature, the wisdom of the author reveals the healing properties of natural plants that have been in use for over four thousand years. This book could not have been written in a more timely fashion, as we are now entering an age where illness is reaching epidemic proportions.

Many of the pharmaceutical drugs we have today have their origins in natural plants, and many new medicines will be discovered in our rain forests in the near future. Conventional medicine has saved many lives with its advanced technology, and I know many people who are alive today thanks to a particular type of drug or surgery that is available in our medical arsenal. But I also believe that many more will be saved by knowing the truth about natural plants, so that we can use the plants as God intended: “And the fruit there shall be for meat and the leaf for medicine.”—Ezekiel 47:12.

It is in every person’s best interest to learn and know about our planet and the plants that grow on it.

Charles E. Facey, ND

Doctor of Naturopathy, Master Herbalist, and Certified Homeopath and Holistic Consultant

Introduction



My own life has been so enriched by herbs and herbal teas that I want to share my enthusiasm with you. Like many people, I've tried herbs in myriad forms, but I can honestly say that I haven't found another way to take herbal remedies for health treatments that can match the simplicity, grace, and effectiveness of herbal teas.

As you venture further into this book to learn more about herbs and herbal teas, I hope you will always remember to use a good measure of common sense for your guide.

A study in 1996 on consumer preferences interviewed people who did not take herbs, asking them if they planned to take herbs in the future. The study revealed that 63 percent of more than one thousand people surveyed plan to take herbal supplements within five years. "the answer to many common ailments" or "part of our daily regimen." Among those surveyed, 60 percent said they would take herbal remedies for energy enhancement, 55 percent said they would take them to prevent colds, 54 percent to boost immunity, and 46 percent to help them sleep. If that population sampling holds on a national scale, it means that more than half of the population could be taking herbs in the near future, which will make herbal remedies even more popular than they are today.

What's the best way to take herbs safely and with confidence? Armed with information. It's essential to know the nature of every substance you put into your body. If you're like most health-conscious consumers today, you don't hesitate to ask your doctor or pharmacist for the available information and potential side effects of prescription medications, and you should be equally as circumspect with herbs.

Keep these commonsense guidelines in mind when you use herbs as health treatments, whether you use them as teas or in other forms.

Herbs shouldn't be used as substitutes for a healthful diet and lifestyle, but as complementary to it.

Herbs should never be used as substitutes for a doctor's prescription.

If you are being treated for any illness and are taking prescription medication for that illness, seek your doctor's consent for herbs you might be considering, either alone or as complementary therapies.

Herbs should not be taken by pregnant women, nursing mothers, or children without the doctor's consent.

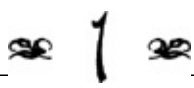
The renowned medical herbalist Penelope Ody recommends that you do not start taking a "tonic" herb while you are in the throes of an illness. Since tonic herbs can be potent, your best course might be to wait until the illness subsides before adding a tonic herb to your health menu, or seek professional guidance.

Know all about the herb *before* you take it.

It's often been said that health is wealth. When you are well informed about herbs, you

have a wealth of knowledge on your side that can save you a lot of time, trouble, and cost mistakes when you are choosing and using herbs. That way, you can add the richness and pleasure of herbs to your daily life and reap true health benefits.

Welcome to the wonderful world of herbal teas. Enjoy!



The Wonders of Tea

It's been called the plant of Heaven.

For 4,000 years, it's been valued both as a medicine and a drink for pleasure.

Tea

Originally, *tea* referred to one species of shrub that was cultivated in China—*Camellia sinensis*—known as the black tea shrub.

A charming legend tells how this ordinary plant became the first natural wonder in the world of herbal teas.

The story takes us back to ancient China in 2737 B.C. when one day, Emperor Shen Nung was kneeling before a fire, heating water. Suddenly a wind stirred. Leaves fluttered down from a branch over his head and fell into the boiling water. The aroma captivated Shen Nung and he decided to taste the brew.

Where did these aromatic leaves come from? An ancient wild species of the black tea shrub. When the leaves are fermented, they produce oolong or black tea, but when they are brewed fresh, as in Shen Nung's tea, they yield the refreshing green tea, which contains the potent antioxidant *catechin*, a bioflavonoid with antibacterial and anticancer properties.

For centuries in China, monks and herbalists studied plants for their healing properties, and handed down their knowledge to the next generation by verbal instruction. To illustrate the importance of tea, a tale tells of an ancient Chinese herbalist who knew 100,000 healing properties of herbs, and began to pass on his wisdom to his son. The herbalist taught his son 80,000 secrets, but fell ill before he could complete the lessons. On his deathbed, the herbalist told his son to come to his grave five years from the date of his death, and there he would find the other 20,000 secrets.

On the fifth year, the obedient son went to his father's grave, and found, growing on the site, the black tea shrub.

The black tea shrub is a plant that has been endowed with the Taoist belief that beauty and harmony are achieved by order and ritual. Every detail in the planting, picking, preparation of the leaves, and ceremonial customs for drinking tea became a cultural phenomenon in the Orient. It was passed on to other cultures as humble gifts from Buddhist monks. When Japanese monks journeyed to China to study with Chinese monks, they returned home with seedlings from the black tea shrub as parting gifts. Today, Japan specializes in the production of green teas, now known as its national beverage. The plants that grow in Japan today are thought to be offshoots of those first seedlings.

The black tea shrub is a plant that has sailed the world on clipper ships and trade routes. In 1559, a tea merchant from Persia told a Venetian scholar about his experience in China drinking tea. The scholar wrote an account of the merchant's tea tale that set the port of Venice buzzing. What was this mysterious brew? Everyone wanted to taste it. By the early 1600s, the Dutch East India Trading Company was bringing shipments of dried herbs from the black tea shrub in specially lined boxes to Europe.

Tea was such precious cargo in its early years of import to Europe, it was reserved for royal tables, or tea-tasting parties of the rich and influential. It was introduced as an exotic medicinal beverage that could promote longevity and cure many disorders. The herb's price exceeded one hundred dollars per pound. But the herb wasn't the only expense involved.

To follow the Chinese custom, tea-drinking ceremonies in Europe required imported china. Tiny Ming teacups from China were made of porcelain and held only a few sips of tea. The cups rested on porcelain saucers, and to brew the tea, a proper Chinese teapot was needed along with a Chinese tea jar to store the dried leaves. This was a costly endeavor that kept tea out of reach for average people. At the time, the process for making porcelain was not known in Europe, and to curb the import costs for drinking tea, the Dutch developed a imitation of the Chinese tea service in elegant blue and white delftware.

One of the earliest tea parties on record in America was held in 1674 in the Dutch Colony of New York (then called New Amsterdam). To taste the newly imported teas, society ladies arrived in their best dresses, carrying their own teacups, fashioned from delicate china, with bowls the size of wineglasses. To this day, many herbalists still specify herbal tea doses as "the size of a small wineglass."

A hundred years later, the Sons of Liberty brewed up the most memorable tea party of them all. In 1773, Americans had independence on their minds, and Britain's prohibitive taxes on tea sparked a revolution. Thirty-two cases of expensive dried herbs were tossed into the harbor on the night of the Boston Tea Party. It was the signal for the birth of a new nation.

For an ordinary plant, the black tea shrub has quite a few tales to tell of romance and intrigue, old worlds and new worlds, culture and customs. But it wasn't the only plant in the tea garden.

Locally grown herbs had been used for teas all over the world, and traded in their own way, though not as aggressively as black, oolong, and green teas. Many Mediterranean herbs were brought to Europe by the early crusaders and the Roman army. Other herbs followed the trade routes of saffron to the far east, and were exchanged for black tea leaves.

Early American colonists learned the secrets of locally grown herbs from the Indians, and these discoveries played an important role in the fight for independence. To protest the British taxes on tea in 1773, American women in Boston, Hartford, and other New England cities vowed to drink teas from indigenous weeds instead of imported teas. The brews they came up with were called *Liberty Tea*. Among them were the antiviral flowers of chamomile, calcium-rich raspberry leaves, and wild American sage, which is so admired by the Chinese as an herb for longevity that it remains a major American export to China today.

The Universal Garden

Through the ages, as the black tea plant mingled with herbs from many cultures, *tea* took on a broader meaning to encompass a wide variety of herbs, and now refers to a brew made from the leaves, flowers, berries, seeds, roots, rhizomes, or bark from a plant, steeped in hot water.

The generic term *plant* acquired the more cultivated name *herb* in botany, the branch of medical science devoted to the study of plants. More than 3,000 herbs have been studied and catalogued with properties that are healing to the human system, and not all of the plants have been studied. Some of our best western drugs were derived from herbs, including the heart medicine *digitalis* from the herb foxglove, and the asthma-aid *ephedrine* from the herb ephedra, and for years, these drugs contained the original herbs as ingredients. It wasn't until World War II, when herb shortages in Europe limited the production of these drugs, that scientists persevered by designing synthetic versions.

Each herb has its own history and folklore that are as captivating as the tale of the black tea shrub.

Some herbs, like mint, were so valued in biblical times that they were used to pay taxes. Other herbs were honored as religious plants and dedicated to gods and goddesses. The golden flowers of calendula (pot marigold) are regarded as a remedy to strengthen the heart, and the herb has been held in high esteem in many religions. In Greek myth, the creation of calendula was attributed to Artemis, goddess of the moon, sister of the sun god, Apollo. In India, Buddhists consider the plant sacred to the goddess Dwiga, and its flowers adorn her emblem. Calendula was given many names in many countries, all associated with *gold*. When Christianity became the predominant religion in Europe, and many medicinal herbs were renamed to harmonize with the new religion, calendula was given the name *Mary's Golden Marigold*, in honor of the Virgin Mary.

Herbs have been found in monastery gardens and royal gardens all over the world, from ancient times to the present. If you look closely, you'll see the wound-healer yarrow and the herb of wisdom, sage, growing in the gardens of the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

Herbs as Healing Foods

Hippocrates said, "Thy food shall be thy medicine," and herbs, as concentrated foods with vital nutrients, vitamins, and medicinal properties, more than fill the bill. In Hippocrates' time, herbs were the official medicines. Throughout the ages, people in every culture have taken herbs for their healing benefits in the same way we take garlic or eat oranges, for the vital nutrients these herbs provide, and their special restorative value to the human body.

In our current medical climate, we've been forewarned that synthetic antibiotics are proving to be ineffective against new viruses. Where do we turn to treat common disorders like colds, the flu, skin eruptions, and hosts of low-grade infections that crop up regularly and keep us from feeling our best? If you turn to herbs, you will find that there are mo

antiviral, antifungal, and antibacterial herbs than you ever dreamed.

More and more scientists are returning to herbs as sources for new medicines. Many modern-day hospitals are including naturopathic clinics as part of their treatment facilities, and many more provide a wider range of options for care. It's a signal that the new medicine for the twenty-first millennium will include more natural alternatives for treatment, and a new view of the oldest treatments in the world—herbs.

The World of Herb Teas

Teas are herbal drinks, and because of that, they can do much more than quench your thirst or calm you after a long day. Teas are the ideal way to get the healing power of herbs into your everyday diet. Drugless remedies. Natural energy. Pure and simple drinks that can provide effective herbal defenses against disease.

I'd like to introduce you to the wonderful world of teas. In this book, you'll find more than one hundred herbs for teas with special healing properties. There's power in those flowers, leaves, roots, rhizomes, berries, seeds, and bark—positive plant energy that is absorbed easily and gently through teas.

There are immunity-building teas to strengthen your body's own natural defenses, or to rebuild your strength after antibiotics, illness, or surgery. There are stress reducers, nervous system soothers, and antianxiety teas. You'll find natural antacids for indigestion, natural anti-histamines to fight hay fever and allergies, and natural antidepressants. There are teas to tone specific body systems, "Chi" teas, to enhance vital energy, tonics for both sexes, and teas for your golden age. A pharmacopoeia of herbal teas is at your beck and call.

You can drink your herbal teas as you like them—hot or iced, plain or sweetened. You can prepare them the easy way, from ready-made tea bags, or you can use dried or fresh herbs and filter the bulk from the liquid before drinking your tea. Whatever way you like them, you'll be amazed at the potential for drugless healing that is available in herbal teas.

Herbal teas are a natural solution for people who want to get the protective health benefits of herbs in their daily diet, but don't feel comfortable taking handfuls of herbs as capsules and rarely use more than the standard herbs like garlic and basil for cooking.

Herbal teas are a valuable resource for people who don't want to rely on pills for minor discomforts and ills.

In our complicated world, it's nice to know that there are still some plain and simple solutions to make our everyday lives easier.

You'll even find some unexpected uses for herbal teas. Herbal teas are pure herbal water that can be used as skin washes or on compresses to heal wounds and reduce inflammation, since your skin is also a transmitter for vital nutrients. They can also be herbal remedies for your bath, and when you steam an herb in a pot of boiling water, it's aromatherapy in the air.

Many herbs come in ready-to-use tea bags that are portable for travelers. They take up no

space in a suitcase and fit in the back pocket of your tightest jeans. There's even a tea for travelers' blight—dysentery—and that's billberry tea.

Herbal teas have been making people feel better for centuries, and the average person who wasn't a monk, herbalist, or botanist probably had no idea why. They drank teas and felt better, so they drank them again.

Take chamomile tea, for instance. You might drink chamomile for its soothing feeling or as a sleep-aid, without realizing that it also treats irritable bowel syndrome, eases indigestion, and has antibacterial properties to keep infections away. That's a soothing reason to keep drinking chamomile tea. Or peppermint tea. You might like peppermint for its refreshing taste, without realizing you are also treating your liver to a tonic, fighting nasal congestion, and cooling inflamed joints. Or rosemary, the herb of remembrance. That's not just a sentimental adage about rosemary. The tea increases the circulation to your brain, which enhances alertness and memory.

There's a wonderful world of teas to drink for their special benefits.

And when you do, it will be like rediscovering the Garden of Eden in simple, pleasing drinks.

For natural healing, all you have to do is ...

steep

and

pour.

Sympathetic Remedies

“Better to be deprived of food for three days than of tea for one.”

—ANCIENT CHINESE PROVERB

Herbs are not magic potions reserved for dark rooms, musty shelves, and colored bottles. They're plants that grow in sun or shade; some flower, some bear fruit, some are showy, others are plain, some are woody, and others downy.

In the roots, leaves, flowers, berries, bark, or seeds, herbs have specific biochemical properties that are healing and restorative for our systems. Cranberry, for instance, has naturally occurring calcium. That's good news for people who need calcium and aren't milk drinkers. Dandelion has potassium and is a mild diuretic. That's important news for people who need to prevent fluid retention, but can't afford the potassium losses common to standard diuretics. Dong quai is rich in vitamin E and minerals for a vital energy tonic that can be exceptionally good for menopausal women. Ginseng, an immune system stimulant known as the king of tonics for men, also helps to regulate blood sugar and cholesterol levels.

Herbs do their job because of the properties they contain. There's no magic in it, just biochemistry. We've come to the point in our high-stress lives where we need all of the healing and restoration we can get. Herbs are there to help us.

The Unique Value of Herbs as Teas

Herbal teas are the most effective way to get the benefits of herbs, safely and easily.

UNCOMPROMISED VALUE

Herbal teas are true natural resources! They have no additives, preservatives, or dyes. They aren't sweetened with sugar or sugar substitutes, and they're not mixed with other ingredients that could compromise the herb's effect or give you something you don't want or need. They are also available in caffeine-free varieties.

EASY ABSORPTION

The water in herbal teas plays a vital role to increase the effectiveness of the remedy. Water is essential in your body for the absorption and assimilation of nutrients. The water diffuses the potency of the herb and delivers its properties in a manner that is harmonious with your natural body processes. Unlike herbal capsules that never touch your taste buds,

herbal teas follow the normal digestive process from your mouth through your system, which is an automatic regulator for substances entering your body.

DOSE CONTROL

Many herbs come in premeasured tea bags that take the guesswork out of measuring herbs. Premeasured tea bags insure that you are taking enough of the herb without taking too much. A standard tea bag contains one teaspoon of a dried herb. One teaspoon is a good measure for use for a remedy—a moderate dose of herbs that is safe and effective. With one teaspoon as a measure, even if you use dried herbs in an infuser to make your herbal tea, you have a standard to use for dose control.

CUTTING THROUGH THE CONFUSION

There are hundreds of herbs with healing properties, and each herb has its own unique virtues. As a consumer, you can often be overwhelmed with expensive and varied ways to take herbs—in capsules as a single herb or in blends, as tinctures with alcohol or glycerine, in vials, packets, or premixed formulas. This can become so muddled and costly that the world of herbs becomes a garden of confusion. Herbal teas cut through the confusion about using herbs. They make dealing with herbs a down-to-earth experience.

YEARS OF TRADITION

Herbal teas have centuries of tradition to back up their use. They've been used as drinks for pleasure and healing remedies in every culture, throughout the world.

AFFORDABILITY

Herbal teas are the most cost-effective way to get the benefits of herbs at an affordable price. An average box of tea contains twenty-four tea bags for twenty-four cups of tea, and the average cost is less than five dollars per box. That's about twenty cents per cup. Dried herbs can be purchased from herb shops by the ounce, giving you more versatility in herb selections and even more savings than you get with ready-made tea bags. Herbs that were once reserved for the tables or medicine shelves of royalty are now affordable and available to everyone!

Teas for Two Reasons—Double Benefits

One of the remarkable qualities about many herbs is the fact that they can do more for your body than merely treat symptoms. In many cases, they can treat the symptoms *and* a

underlying weakness.

If you get hay fever, for instance, and take elderberry tea to relieve your stuffiness and congestion, you are deriving other benefits too. While elderberry relieves the symptoms of allergies and hay fever, it also treats an underlying weakness—elderberry strengthens your respiratory tract by helping to remove imbedded phlegm and mucous from the lungs, and reduces inflammation. A stronger respiratory system is your best defense against allergic reactions in the future.

Many herbs have properties that strengthen particular organs or body systems, and when you use them, you may notice that you derive unexpected benefits as well. Milk thistle contains *silymarin*, a flavonoid that helps to rejuvenate your liver, one of the primary organs for detoxifying your system. When you take milk thistle tea to tone your liver, skin problems can improve, depression can lift, headaches can be less frequent, and you might notice that you have more energy. These problems are often associated with a weak liver, and they can abate as you strengthen the organ that was weak.

When you take herbs as teas, you get the benefits of the herbs and some delightful drinks too. They add pleasure to your daily menu, and they add a whole new dimension to healing.

Where Do You Start?

ONE TEA A DAY IS BETTER THAN NONE

Start very simply, and seek out one herbal tea that might be useful for your current needs, such as papaya tea, if you suffer from acid indigestion and routine digestive distress.

More than one hundred herbs are highlighted in this book, with a brief description of each herb, its folklore, its uses in history, its properties and values. You'll probably be surprised to see how many vitamins and minerals you can receive from one cup of herbal tea. Along with each herb's profile, you'll also find ideas for special teas.

TWO TEAS A DAY ARE BETTER THAN ONE

If you find two herbal teas to help you, that alone would make your discovery of herbs worthwhile. Over time, as you learn to trust the gentle relief and healing benefits that herbal teas bring, you'll find more teas to help you resolve everyday disorders as they surface.

Then you might want to try a few herbal teas that have deeper, disease-preventive properties. Astragalus is a splendid tea to try if your immunity has been weakened by too many rounds of antibiotics, recent surgery, or if you suffer from exhaustion and feel totally depleted of strength. Oatstraw is a full-body tonic and a natural antibiotic. Slippery elm is especially good for intestinal stress, including colitis, and it helps to heal inflamed conditions throughout the body.

Then one day you might notice that you feel calmer and more energetic than you used to feel; you don't seem to get colds as easily as you used to; and when you face those everyday ills, you have some reliable methods for dealing with them.

That day, you'll realize that you've made a breakthrough. You might look at the boxes of tea or collection of dried herbs on your shelf and pause in amazement. Plain and simple drinks. Plain and simple healing.

That's the beauty of herbal teas!

How Much—and How Often—for Health Treatments?

You don't need to take handfuls of herb capsules, or drink the same tea ten times a day to reap the benefits of an herbal remedy. One great tea, once a day, is a positive step forward. Two great teas a day can be a real health advantage.

If you are just starting to use herbs for their healing properties, I would recommend that you begin with moderate doses, like the dose in one cup of tea in the morning. If you struggle with depression or nervous tension, for instance, try St. John's wort tea. You will notice its soothing effect immediately, and the herb will continue to work its way through your system for the next several hours. If you are fighting a tough and recurrent problem with depression and tension, you might try St. John's wort again in the evening. But there's no need to take the tea again in the evening, if one tea in the morning soothed you all day.

When you are using teas for healing treatments, a good rule is to take the tea as you need it, once or twice a day, and use it for one week.

After a week, evaluate your progress. If the problem has abated, there's no reason to take the tea every day.

You can use the tea intermittently, for a tune-up.

The best way to use herbs for healing is to use a moderate approach, since herbs work slowly and steadily to relieve your symptoms and balance your system as well.

One or two cups of an herbal tea, in the morning and evening, is a very successful treatment. Try it! I think you'll agree.

Targeting Your Tea—Starting With Simple

To target your herbal tea, refer to [Chapter 5](#), which provides an Herbal Guide to Health. It gives you a list of common health problems and health-oriented needs in A-Z format, followed by a selection of herbal teas that can be used for treatment.

START WITH SIMPLES

Identify the herb most suited to your current health needs and buy ready-made tea bags with that herb, or the dried herb to make your tea. A tea made from only one herb is called *simple*, meaning that the herb is the only ingredient in the tea—nothing is added to sweeten

or enhance it, and it is not combined with other herbs.

If you are a newcomer to the garden of herbal teas, and want to use an herb for a specific treatment, like eyebright tea if you suffer from tiredness and eyestrain from too much computer work, your best bet is to buy the *simple*—plain eyebright tea. That will allow you to get the true, rich taste of the herb, as well as allow you to evaluate how you feel while drinking it, and how your system responds to it. It will also give the herb the best chance to do what nature designed it for, with speed and efficiency, because the herb is in its pure state.

Using *simples* for treatments helps you avoid confusion about herbs, and teaches you about each herb as you drink it.

You can find boxes of *simple* teas at your local health food store. Often, health food stores will stock a complete selection of plain herbs for teas, from A-Z—alfalfa to yarrow, or they can order a specific herbal tea for you. The herbs in boxes will come in tea bags or in bulk form (the dried herb). Check the box to insure that you are getting the form you desire—*tea bags* or *bulk*.

Some of the more familiar herbs like chamomile, peppermint, and ginkgo can be found in supermarkets, pharmacies, and grocery stores, but there is one cautionary note. Be sure to check the list of ingredients to be certain that the only constituent is the herb alone. If the list of ingredients says that it uses a “flavoring” instead of an herb, that tea will not necessarily give you the specific benefits you are seeking. For instance, you might want to try raspberry tea for its healing effect on the urinary tract. In a supermarket, you find a tea that is called “Raspberry Tea,” but when you read the ingredients, you discover that it contains black tea with raspberry flavoring. While the black tea can be a delightful drink with its own virtues, you are looking for plain raspberry tea made from the herb raspberry.

Teas for Pleasure and Treatment

You can look at the world of teas in two equally pleasant ways:

- *Tea for Pleasure—Health Benefits Extra.* Since there are so many herbal teas with exquisite tastes, you can select your teas for pleasure alone, and get the health benefits as a bonus.

For instance, sage has a woody, brisk, and spirited taste, and it has antioxidants to prevent premature aging of cells. Rosemary is piney, fragrant, and tender to the taste, and it's also a circulatory tonic that helps to digest fats. Fenugreek has a deep, nutty flavor and it's comforting for stomach disorders. Chinese oolong, which helps to lower cholesterol levels, has been called light, rich, lush, and refreshing, reminiscent of an herb garden after a summer shower.

- *Tea for Treatment.* If you take an herbal tea for its specific health properties, the best way to take it is *plain*. That way, you will get to know your healing herb as well as any expert can, by personal taste, and personal response, and you have a world of herbal teas to choose from. When you feel run-down and can't seem to find your old energy, or if you struggle with lingering disorders, then the plainest-tasting teas can become your favorites, because the

work so well.

When I first started my discovery of herbal teas, I took the teas plain and couldn't believe the surprising tastes of many of the less common herbs. Some charmed me the minute they touched my lips, while others seemed bland, boring, or even mildly bitter at the first taste. But a funny thing happened to me. Since I was taking an herb tea for a particular health benefit, I suspended my judgment on the first taste, in favor of the effect. In just about every case, the effect was better than I dreamed, so I continued to drink the particular herbal tea regardless of the taste. Over time, I found that some tastes I thought I disliked at first were now intriguing. I began to long for the taste of bitter brews, because they were so good to me. My internal response was to crave what was healing. Herbs with bitters are excellent regulators for the digestive system, and now I'd say the taste of an herb tea with bitters is something to savor like a fine, aged wine.

A friend of mine had a similar experience. She used to prefer teas with honey, or sweetened tea blends, because she likes sweet foods and drinks. Then one day, she caught an intense head cold and wanted to put it in check as quickly as she could. She suffers from allergies and bouts of asthma, so in her case any infection in her sinuses can lead to more serious consequences. In her frustration with the cold, she was less concerned with taste and more interested in results. She took plantain tea *plain*, an herb with an all-business taste and the remarkable ability to pull the toxins out of your mucous linings and dry a head cold fast.

The next day, she called and said her head started clearing within twenty minutes after taking the plantain tea, so she shut off her phone and went to bed. With former colds because of her asthmatic condition, she often wound up in the hospital for a night, because she has a difficult time with many over-the-counter cold medications.

Since then, she's been taking herbal teas plain, some with tastes that would have seemed unusual to her before, and she loves them without sweeteners. She also claims that when she drinks the herbal teas with bitters, she craves less sugar. That's another benefit of bitters herbs, they stabilize your digestion.

Many herbalists say that you should get to know an herb you are taking, and in a sense develop a friendship with it, learn to admire its taste and virtues. That way, healing works better.

Bags or Bulk Tea

READY-TO-USE TEA BAGS

Perfect herbal tea is quick and easy with premeasured tea bags. All you have to do is boil water, pour it in your favorite cup, drop the tea bag in, and wait 3-5 minutes. Don't forget to press the potency from the tea bag before removing it from your cup.

Drink your tea warm, or pour the brew into a tall glass filled with ice. If you're concerned about the potency of an herb in tall glasses of iced teas then let your tea steep longer in hot

water to get a stronger brew. Add additional cold water to fill the glass as needed. Another option is to make two bags for a full-flavored iced tea. Hot or cold, good health was never so easy!

BULK HERBS FOR TEAS

Herbs may come as loose dried herbs (bulk) in tea boxes, or you can buy them by the ounce from herb shops. Preparing a tea from bulk herbs is easier than you think. After a while, you'll learn to love this method because you can make your brew exactly the way you like it.

To make an ideal tea from bulk herbs without any extra equipment, put a heaping tablespoon of bulk herbs into your favorite cup. Boil water in a nonmetal teapot, if possible. Pour the hot water into the cup, cover the cup, and let your herbs steep for 3-5 minutes. Strain the bulk before drinking. That's all there is to it! If you don't have a teapot to boil water, don't forgo the tea. Use a saucepan to boil the water, nonmetal if possible.

To strain your tea, you can use a nylon sieve, a small strainer, or—if you have none of these accoutrements available—you can use an unbleached coffee filter. It's better than skipping the tea.

A great way to make bulk teas is to use a tea infuser, available at your supermarket or health food store.

Spoon Infuser. A spoon-sized metal infuser opens to fit your dried herbs inside, and closes to put in your tea cup. It has holes on the sides of the spoon to release the properties into the water, without the bulk. Purists might argue that it's not the best choice, because it's metal.

Strainer Infuser. A circular plastic spoon infuser has strainers on both sides to allow the brew to be made without bulk in the water. It fits a heaping tablespoon of dried herbs and snaps tightly to enclose the herbs. I found mine at the supermarket in a rack next to the teas.

Tea balls. Tea balls are also available in your health food store or market. It's a small, egg-shaped infuser, with holes in the sides, and a chain, to float herbs right in your teapot, and capture the essence of the herb without the bulk in the water. To use the tea ball, wait until the water in your teapot is briskly boiling, turn off the flame, wait a minute until the water comes off the boil, and insert your tea ball with the bulk herbs inside.

Steep your tea a little longer if you want a richer brew—from five to seven minutes, or up to ten minutes for real strength of character.

You don't need expensive equipment to make a great tea from dried herbs. Remember how the first tea was brewed? Shen Nung's tea was made with leaves that fell into his pot of boiling water under an open fire.

You can make extra tea and store it in the refrigerator to drink later. It will retain its flavor for two days. With teas, color is no indication of strength. Some of the palest tea waters can be the most potent.

Fresh-from-the-Garden Herbal Teas

The taste of an herbal tea made from fresh herbs is exhilarating. And if the herb comes from your own garden, it gives you a sense of satisfaction that is unbeatable. Peppermint, for instance, is so aromatic that you get invigorated with a snap of a leaf. Plant peppermint in your garden to have iced peppermint tea on a hot August day. Freeze the herb fresh, or dry for future use, to have warm peppermint tea in winter.

You can make your teas from fresh garden herbs, but keep these precautions in mind:

- Never pick herbs in the wilds to use for teas, since you cannot know whether the area was sprayed with chemical insecticides.
- Make sure a neighboring plant isn't woven into the herb you are picking, since plants tend to be friendly with each other.
- Be sure to use the correct parts of the plant for your tea. Each herb has specific parts that are used for their healing properties. For instance, calendula tea only uses the flower petals, but rosemary tea uses the whole plant above the root. To find out which parts of an herb are used, look up the herb you want to pick for your tea, and check the *Beneficent Parts* for that herb.
- Pick the freshest herbs you can get, and wash them thoroughly. Peppermint castile soap is an excellent wash for herbs.

INFUSION METHOD

This method is used for softer parts of a plant, such as flowers, stems, or leaves. Cut your herb into small pieces and use two tablespoons of fresh herb per cup. Pour freshly boiled water over the herb in your cup. Cover the cup and let it stand for 7-10 minutes. Strain and drink.

CONCOCTION METHOD

For fresh tea from the harder parts of a plant, such as bark, twigs, seeds, roots, or rhizomes, a stronger method is needed. Cut the hard parts into small pieces, and measure two tablespoons of fresh herb per cup. Place the herb in a saucepan, cover it with cold water, and bring the water to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for one hour. Strain and drink. Extra tea can be refrigerated.

Ginger After Dinner

Pick up a ginger root at your grocery store and try the concoction method to turn it

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