

Tea

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Tea or tisanes during the Renaissance (16th and 17th centuries) are strongly similar to our modern teas - minus mechanical and chemical processing. The history of tea dates back to ancient China. The migration of tea is varied; however, it is said that in 1610 the first Japanese and Chinese teas were shipped from Java to Europe. Europeans that traveled to China reported drinking reddish-brown medicinal tasting brews known in China as tcha or cha (in Europe it became known as tea). Tea remained a relative rarity in the West of Europe before the 1700's. It was found in England and Europe only at court, in the homes of the very wealthy, or as an exotic, expensive drink in coffee houses. The first public sale of tea in England was in London at a popular coffee house in 1657. In 1662, when Charles II married Catherine Braganza (a Portuguese princess), her devotion to the beverage made tea a fashionable drink among the English aristocracy and further legitimized it in a way the coffee houses could not. Tea was very expensive, around \$1000 per pound and was served from silver and porcelain containers. Sugar and saffron were added and as much as 50 cups per person were drunk at one sitting. It was not uncommon for an aristocrat (both male and female) to drink in excess of 200 cups per day.

The tea plant is a flowering evergreen shrub. The mature leaves are elliptical with serrated edges, dark green, smooth, of a leathery texture, and from one to twelve inches in length. The difference in types and taste of tea is not from the diversity of species, but in where it is grown, when and how it is plucked, and what is done to the leaves after they are plucked. There are three classes of tea:

- **Black** - Fully fermented leaf - resembles raw leaf the least after it has been processed
- **Green** - Unfermented leaf- still resembles raw leaf
- **Oolong** - Semi-fermented tea

The history of herbs is closely related to tea, though more ancient. Primitive man was attracted to the leaves, fruits, seeds, and roots of herb plants, and he would choose them for food over many other plants. He learned to combine them with water to make the first herbal "teas". Although they were not called tea, this practice continued on into the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Women usually repeated old family recipes proven, by trial and error, to work on common illnesses. Some of the herbs commonly used were:

- **Anise** - The seeds make a spicy, sweet tea with a licorice flavor. This mixture was thought to help with coughs and digestion.
- **Chamomile** - In the Middle Ages this was planted in paths, for when it was walked upon, it gave off a strong apple-like scent. Chamomile tea is slightly bitter and was used as a soothing sedative.
- **Mint** - A tea made with mint would aid in the cure of upset stomach, rheumatism, chills, poor circulation, influenza, lack of appetite and nausea.
- **Rose** - The tea can be made from both the petal and the hip of the flower. Today, rose hips are noted for their high content of vitamin C. Although this was not a known fact at the time, what was known was that a tea made with rose hips was good for colds, coughs, and kidney complaints.

Tea has been a symbol of England for centuries and remains so today. Seldom has a beverage been so intimately associated with the history of a nation.