

# Did You Know?

---



## Tea – *Camellia sinensis*

- Tea is the woody shrub *Camellia sinensis*. It is also the beverage resulting from steeping leaves in hot water, specifically from the plant *Camellia sinensis*. (the beverage obtained from steeping other herbs and spices is called a tisane or commonly referred to as herb tea).
- White, green, oolong, black tea and Pu' erh come from the same *Camellia sinensis* plant.
- Two varieties are in cultivation for tea harvest:
  - *Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis* – has relatively small and narrow leaves used primarily to produce green and China black tea. It is likely native to western Yunnan.
  - *Camellia sinensis* var. *assamica* – has larger, droopy, leathery leaves and is primarily used to make Assam (Indian) black tea. It is native to warmer parts of Assam (India), southern China, Burma, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia.
- Do not confuse the tea plant, *Camellia sinensis* with Australian native tea tree, *Melaleuca alternifolia*.
- Traditional harvesting of tea is done by hand, two leaves and a bud (leaf, not flower) and then processed, which determines the tea type. Machine harvest (crush-tear-curl) is also used primarily for the tea bag industry.
- After harvest, tea leaves are allowed to wither (wilt and soften) and then are typically rolled, cut or crushed. The oxidation (when oxygen connects with the enzymes in the leaf) process that follows determines the tea type. Firing or heat is applied to finish drying the leaves.
- White tea is the minimal processed, un or recently opened buds that are simply plucked dried.
- Green tea is plucked, withered, rolled and heat dried, but is not oxidized. Leaves may be rolled in a variety of shapes. The heating technique can be either steamed or dried in a large dry pan.
- Oolong tea is made from a process that is a cross between green and black tea. Partial oxidation of the leaves, 8 to 80%, is allowed to happen prior to the final heat finishing. The process taken for the various types of oolong tea provides a complex and smooth flavor with low astringency.

# Did You Know?

---



- Black Tea is fully oxidized before final drying stage. It has the strongest in flavor and a higher astringency than the other tea types. It is most often the type of tea used in iced tea.
- Pu'erh Tea is produced more like green tea except it is pressed into cakes or other shapes and fermented for a few months or years.
- Medicinal use of tea in China dates back almost 5000 years.
- Tea was discovered in the tomb of ancient Han emperor Jing Di in Western China. The 2,200-year-old tea is the oldest tea ever found, providing new evidence that ancient Chinese royalty drank tea.
- The caffeine content of tea is affected by brewing methods such as water temperature and steeping time, leaf size, as well as growing conditions, weather and when the tea was harvested.
- In general, black tea has about 1/3 as much caffeine as the same amount of filtered coffee.
- The first tea bags were produced commercially around 1904. Cheaper grades of tea and the smallest broken pieces known as “fannings” or “dust” were (and still are) used because the full leaves didn't have room to expand. Larger bags (known as sachets) able to hold full leaves are now available which offer convenience and better flavor.