



## **Herbal Tea Making**

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## **Beginning Thoughts**

When using medicinal herbs, there are many preparation choices for the average herb user. Even in this busy world, herbal teas are still a good option for many people. Some of the features that would entice a person to select a tea are:

- They are inexpensive.
- They are easy to make once you learn the basics.
- They impose a ceremonial process during their preparation.
- They provide a rest time while drinking them.

So if you want to save a little money, learn the ancient art of tea making and take a few moments to rest and savor your tea, keep on reading. Become a master tea maker. It all starts with the easy to read, easy to follow directions on tea making below.

## **Tools To Make Teas**



If you have something to cook water in and a canning jar, you have all the tools you need. Some other useful items are a Kettle, Teapot, French Press, strainer and Mug. Be sure your tools are glass, stainless steel or enamel. You don't want to use a container that might react with the herbs.

### **Safety**

Only make teas with herbs that are safe to drink.

### **Types of Tea Preparations**

Teas are divided into two basic types of tea preparations. The infusion and the decoction. Depending on what you want to extract from the herb and how dense the herb is, will

depend on which type of preparation you use.

### **When To Choose An Infusion**

Infusions are used for extraction of labile constituents such as vitamins, enzymes and volatile oils. They are also used for delicate and less dense parts of the plant such as flowers and leaves. Some seeds are also infused as well as roots with volatile oils such as elecampane or valerian.

### **When To Choose A Decoction**

Decoctions are used for plant constituents that require more time and heat for extraction, such as mineral salts, bitter constituents and hard, dense plant parts such as barks, roots, and some seeds.

## **Infusions**

### **How to Make An Infusion**

An infusion is a gentle method to extract constituents from the herb. When making an infusion, the plant material is cut small, torn up or bruised to release its essence. The idea is to get as many parts of the plant in contact with the water as possible. If you have bought "cut & sift" herb from someone else, it is probably already cut up for use in an infusion.



### **Example of timing and how it changes the ultimate preparation**

If you infuse an herb like chamomile, the essential oil will be released quickly and taste and smell divine if drunk within a few minutes. However, if you want the bitter constituents in chamomile which often we do if using it medicinally, you want to infuse it longer. The longer you infuse it the more bitter it will get.

### **Directions for one cup of infusion**

Four recommended methods:

1. Add one cup of boiling water to one heaping tablespoon of dry herb or three heaping tablespoons of fresh herb in an air-tight container like a canning jar. Let it steep for 10-25 minutes.
2. Bring one cup of water to boil in a stainless steel or glass kettle. Remove the kettle from the burner and add one heaping tablespoon of the dry herb or three heaping tablespoons of fresh herb to the water. Cover the kettle with a tight fitting lid. Steep for 10-25 minutes. Remove the lid, strain and drink the liquid.
3. Put one heaping tablespoon of dry herb or three heaping tablespoons of fresh herb in a pint canning jar. Pour one cup of boiling water over the herb and put the lid on the canning jar. Let it sit overnight and drink the next morning. This method is often used for extracting minerals. When I am attempting to extract minerals I put extra herb in my jar. I often put a handful in and fill the quart jar with water. Most mineral rich herbs are food herbs such as oats and drinking strong tea of a nutritious herb such as oats is usually not terrible tasting. If you use herbs in large amounts, make sure they are safe herbs to consume in quantities.
4. Put one heaping tablespoon of dry herb or three heaping tablespoons of fresh herb in a pint canning jar. Pour one cup of room temperature or cool water over the herb and put the lid on the canning jar. Let it sit overnight and drink the next morning. This will make a very mild infusion and picks up small amounts of volatile oils and energetic essences of the plant. Often this method is used for full moon infusions.

These infusions can be consumed hot or cold, depending on the specific usage. Large quantities can be made and stored in the refrigerator. Do not store tea for longer than 3 days because it may grow mold.

## **Solar Infusion**

This type of infusion relies on the sun to provide heat to draw out constituents. You put your herb into a canning jar. Then add clean spring water, well water or filtered water using the same amounts as listed above. (1 T per cup water if dry or 3 T per cup water if fresh.) Simply multiple the herb and water depending on how much tea you want to end up with. You put the herb in the jar. Pour cold water over the herb, tighten the lid on the jar and put the jar in the direct sun. I often make sun tea in gallon canning jars when I have friends visit.



## **Lunar Infusion**

Lunar infusions are wonderful for certain herbs. I place the herb in the jar and pour cold rather than hot water over the herb and place it under the moon at night. Usually I do this when the moon is full. It is especially nice for herbs with volatile oils. I do notice quite a difference when it is hot at night as compared to when it cools down. The heat of course does much of the extraction. When cool out at night, I get just the bare essence of the plant. I have to be sure to retrieve it before the sun is up. It is lovely and somewhat magical with certain plants. I suggest you try this with something like peppermint.

## **Decoctions**

### **How to Make A Decoction**

In a kettle, bring one cup of water and one tablespoon of dry herb or three heaping tablespoons of fresh herb to a boil. Cover the kettle with a tight fitting lid, and simmer the ingredients for 15 - 25 minutes. Remove the kettle from the burner and steep ten minutes. Strain and drink.

### **Examples of when to choose an infusion or decoction**

If you are trying to extract minerals from an herb like nettles you can either use a hot water infusion overnight or you can decoct it for 25 minutes. They will both give you a similar amount of minerals. (I have made both up and sent it to a lab for testing. The decoction gave a tad bit more but not enough to matter.) However, the overnight infused one in my opinion usually tastes better. I am more likely to drink something that tastes good, so guess which one I will make. Usually, leafy herbs like nettles are not decocted and the only time I would decoct them is if I want to extract something like minerals and don't have the time for a 12 hour infusion.

Roots are generally decocted as they are dense and hard. However, if you are decocting a root with volatile oils such as valerian or elecampane you will want to infuse the root so you do not lose the essential oils. To make sure you extract it completely, you can cut up or pulverize the root into small pieces so the water can get into more parts of the root for a better extraction. You don't want a powder, you just want it mashed up or cut small. Although you could use a powder, it will be hard to strain the tea.

## **Drinking the Tea**

Ahhhh, now for the relaxing part.



The amount of tea you ingest will depend on if you are ingesting it for pleasure, or health. It is impossible to give a specific amount to drink, but since I know you want a guideline, I would tell you that  $\frac{1}{2}$  - 1 cup three to five times a day will usually be the range. Some herbs need to be taken in very small amounts to work. For instance if you are using a bitter to stimulate digestion, you only need a few sips of a strong tea for it to help. Acute conditions usually require more of a tea and it is usually taken more often than chronic conditions. Some herbs should only be taken in small amounts as they can be irritating if taken in large amounts of too often. It is important to always know what you are ingesting before ingesting it.

## **Beyond the Basics**

You now know the basics of herbal tea making. However, there are some questions that might come up as you are making and using herbal teas. I will cover some of the common questions now.

What do you do when you want to prepare a formula of 6 different herbs and some need to be decocted and some infused? How do you make bad tasting teas taste better? What are the advantages and disadvantages of herbal teas. We will cover these questions below.



## **Why Make Herbal Teas**

Many of us use them. We love to grow and harvest our own tea and then consume the wonderful, healthy beverages as we sit and enjoy their flavors or think about their health giving benefits.

### **They have important advantages**

- Inexpensive
- Easy to make
- Imposes a ceremonial process and rest time for individuals.
- Allows the person to take a larger part in their healing process.
- It is self-empowering to be more self sufficient.

### **They also have some disadvantages**

- Dry herb only last for one year - roots and seeds may last a little longer.
- They are bulky and take up room on your shelf.



- Takes time to make them.
- Teas have to be stored in the refrigerator and can only store for 48 hours or if you want to push it up to 3 days.
- If they taste bad, there is a lot to drink.
- Some herbs will not extract well. An example would be resinous herbs.

### **What To Do With A Formula That Has A Mix of Herbs Needing Decocting & Infusing**

What do you do when you want to prepare a tea of many different herbs and some need to be decocted and some infused?

When the formula is being prepared, separate the herbs into two containers. One container holds the herbs to be decocted and another container that holds the herbs to be infused.

Start by making the decoction. Put all the hard, dense plant parts such as barks, roots, and some seeds into the cooking pot that will be decocted. Let them decoct for the necessary time and when they are finished decocting take the pot off the burner and add the herbs to be infused into the pot also. In both cases make sure the lid to the pot is on tight. Let it steep for the necessary time and strain it all.

## **Straining Teas**



When you strain your teas, pick up the herb in your strainer and squeeze all the liquid out of the herb material. Some of the best stuff is still in the herbs and you don't want to throw it into your compost before squeezing it out. You can use your clean, bare hands to do this or a small, thin tea towel can be used.

## **Using Ground Herb Vs Cut & Sift Herb**

Usually "cut and sift" herb is used for teas. If you grind the herb up into a powder it will extract well but be sure to use cheese cloth or a coffee filter to filter the tea as you pour it into your cup. I also suggest squeezing the powdered herb real well as those small powder particles will want to hold onto a lot of that herbal liquid. You want to squeeze out every drop you can as it is holding the most potent part of your tea. You could designate a special thin tea towel for the task or have cheese cloth just for this use. That will allow you to reuse the cloth after washing it. Powdered material will cling to more water than the cut and sift herbs and you will get less final amount of liquid tea when you use powdered herb. This is one reason most people use cut and sift rather than powder to make teas.

## **When to Infuse Seeds and Roots (They are usually decocted)**

Delicate seeds or roots as well as seeds or roots with volatile oils need to be infused. If you are making a root or seed decoction and it does not work as you expect it should, make sure it does not have volatile oils in it that require you to infuse it rather than decoct it. Examples of where this might be important is with Archangelica root, Dong quai root, Valeian root and Elecampane root.

If infusing hard seeds and roots you may need to pulverize them a bit with a mortar and pestle to break them up into small enough particles to extract all their goodness from within. If you don't have a mortar and pestle, you can put them in a bag and roll over them with a rolling pin. If they are too hard to break that way, double bag them and get out a rubber mallet or even a hammer. Put the bag on your cutting board and break them up by banging on them. I often save old bags that are not good for other things for this very purpose. I break up nuts, wax and all sorts of things this way. Even a pot with a real thick bottom can be used to break up seeds or roots. Just be careful not to hurt your cookware or your counter.

## **Tight Lids & Volatile Oils**

When making a tea by decocting it in a pot, make sure the lid to the pot fits well. When infusing herbs in a container such as a canning jar, make sure the jar lid is on tight enough not to loose vapors into the air. This is especially important when you are making tea from a plant with a lot of volatile oils. Those oils are important and you don't want to loose them into the air. If you open the jar or pot before it has cooled slightly you will loose all your precious essential oils as they volatilize into the air. So even if the tea has steeped long enough, you may need to wait to open the jar lid until the tea changes from hot to the touch to warm to the touch.

## **How to Make An Herbal Tea Taste Good**

What if the tea tastes bad? You have other choices than using it as a tea. However, if you want to use the herb as a tea, try adding other flavors to it that taste good.

- Adding lemon and honey is a solution that makes many teas taste better.
- Using additional herbs in the mixture that are added only for flavor is another choice.
- Infusing dried berries such as raspberry, apple, blueberry or even raisins with the herbs while making the tea lends to some wonderful flavors.

- Essential oils are an additional alternative. You probably have some herbal essential oils in your kitchen that you use in cooking. Look in the pantry. Try anise or peppermint or whatever is there that you think might work for you. It is good to add an essential oil that will have an additive effect to the health benefits of the other herbs in the cup of tea. When adding essential oils, don't add more than 1-2 drops to a cup or you will be overwhelmed. Put one drop at a time in, stir well and taste. Don't taste without stirring as the essential oil will still be on the top of the cup and you will get it all in one sip.

- With kids I have had parents use the fruit infusions mentioned above or mix the tea with a non-sweetened fruit juice. Most kids will take it with dark grape juice if nothing else works as it often hides other flavors.