

## Both Green and Black Teas Provide Health Benefits

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When the heat goes up outside, we southerners just toss more ice in the tea. A big cold glass of iced tea seems to make a hot summer day a little more bearable.

There are a lot of new beverages on the store shelves these days, but they have a hard time competing with the oldest caffeine drink known to man. The “Nutrition Bible” written by Anderson and Deskins, explains how all tea comes from the same green Asian shrub, *Camellia sinensis*. The way the tea is processed will determine if it will be green or black, green being the most natural process.

A lot of research has been done on the health benefits of tea. Green tea first appeared to be the health champion, but additional studies have shown both types of teas should be recognized. “The Color Code”, written by Joseph, Nadeau and Underwood, is full of researched evidence showing both their roles in fighting cardiovascular disease and cancer. The researchers found the best health benefits come from either black or green tea that has been brewed. For those folks needing to avoid caffeine, decaffeinated teas are fine, but will lose some of their disease-fighting power. Also, a “Consumer Reports” study found instant teas and bottled teas to have even less protective benefits.

It is important to remember tea is a plant made from dry leaves that could contain low levels of bacteria, yeast, and mold. Improper brewing temperatures and storage for long periods of time could give microorganisms just what they need to grow out of control and cause a foodborne illness. The National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation recommends brewed tea never be held at room temperature for more than one day. The leftovers should then be discarded. Refrigerated tea can be safely held for 1 week. At home, be sure to start with clean and sanitized equipment and containers for brewing and storing tea. The tea leaves need to be steeped in water at a minimum of 175°F and the tea leaves exposed to the water for approximately five minutes. Automatic iced tea machines need to heat the water for 195°F.

Tea may come from the same plant, but it doesn't taste the same worldwide, state to state or house to house. Even though there are usually directions for making tea on the purchased container, consumers have different degrees of success in making tea.

Start with fresh tea. Tea leaves should be stored in airtight containers away from any heat or moisture. Tea leaves have a shelf life of 18 months, but fresher tea will taste better.

Time and temperature are important when making tea, not the color of the tea. Some teas brew light and others brew dark. Aerated water will taste best. Allow the water to run cold from the tap so it will be fresh and aerated. Bring the water to a boil and remove immediately from the heat source. Add tea leaves (loose or in bags) and cover the container while brewing.

Use a timer and brew tea for only 5 minutes! Tea may become bitter if brewed any longer. The maximum color and flavor will be released in 5 minutes. REMOVE tea bags or loose leaves, squeezing gently. For sweetened tea, be sure to add sugar to the hot brewed tea to dissolve, before adding more cold water.

Good tea leaves can't make bad water taste good. Your water source will affect the taste of your tea. That is why you can follow a recipe exactly and it still not taste like the tea someone else made.

I don't know where it originated, but many scholars have passed down a legend giving Chinese emperor Shen Nung credit for discovering tea one day in 2737 B.C. The legend tells of a breeze coming up while he was relaxing under a shade tree. The breeze carried a few leaves from a wild tea tree into a pot of boiling water being prepared by the emperor's servant. All you tea lovers can be thankful that the emperor decided to drink the water anyway, making tea a favorite worldwide, coming in 2<sup>nd</sup> only to water!