

Just Tea



By Jordan Salkin

About Tea

It seems like the whole world just talks about coffee. There are thousands of coffee shops, types of coffee, advertisements about coffee, and so on. However, most people do not realize that coffee is not the number one beverage consumed (after water). Tea is. Not to mention, tea is also one of the healthiest beverages to drink because of its many antioxidants. Like coffee, tea comes in many varieties. Popular ones include white, green, rooibos, oolong, and black. These five kinds of teas all contain leaves that come from the Chinese plant *Camellia sinensis*. After tealeaves undergo several processes, such as oxidation and withering, they are left in hot or boiling water to steep,

which then makes the tea. Each type of tea has unique characteristics, such as steep times, flavors, and colors.

Tea first originated in China, traveled throughout Asia, spread to Great Britain, and is now popular all around the world. Legend has it that people first drank tea because it had herbal medicinal qualities to it. This occurred in 2737 BC when the Emperor of China was thought to have discovered tea. Then, during the Western Zhou Dynasty, people began drinking tea because it was believed to be a religious offering. Next, during the Han Dynasty, which reigned from 202 BC to 220 AD, the only people that drank tea were the rich

and the royal. This was because tea leaves were very limited and rare. Tea did not start to become common and popular until the Tang Dynasty, which ruled from 618-907 AD. More tea plants were discovered around this time, which allowed the Chinese government to let more people grow tea and for more teashops to become available to commoners.

In this article, five different teas (white, green, rooibos, oolong and black) are viewed in depth to reveal each of their unique qualities. Each tea has a different story of how it was first discovered as well as their different health benefits, processing techniques, and characteristics.



White Loose-Leaf Tea



Green Loose-Leaf Tea



Rooibos Loose-Leaf Tea



Oolong Loose-Leaf Tea



Black Loose-Leaf Tea

White Tea

白茶

White tea is known to be the first tea ever discovered. Around the time of the Tang Dynasty in China (618-907 AD), only the wealthy and the royalty could afford to drink white tea. The leaves and buds were very rare and delicate to process, so it was not a beverage consumed by the average commoner. It was not until around the nineteenth century that many other types of white tea were produced, making it a very popular beverage for the average person.



White tea gets its name because of little silvery-white hairs that are on the buds and leaves; the beverage itself is not white. White tea is also known as the least processed tea. When a tea is not processed as much, there are typically more health benefits; therefore, the tea is healthier to drink. Thus, to get the maximum amount of health benefits, drink this type of tea. It contains a high level of antioxidants and catechins, which help lessen the risk of Atherosclerotic plaques, strokes, cardiovascular disease, and even cancer. In addition, there have been many studies conducted that show that white tea can help fight viral and bacterial growth, improve skin cells, and help with aging. Lastly, white tea contains very little caffeine, so it can just be appreciated for its light, delicate, and sweet flavor.

This type of tea does not go through a lot of processing due to its delicacy. The leaves are lightly processed so they do not prevent further oxidation. After being picked, the leaves are withered, rolled, and dried naturally under certain conditions. White tealeaves do not go through any kind of panning, rolling, or shaking. By avoiding

those steps plus the minimal oxidation, the tealeaves keep all of the antioxidants and catechins. After the leaves are dried, they can finally be used to make the beverage. To prepare the best cup of white tea, heat water to about 175-180 degrees Fahrenheit and use 2 teaspoons of the loose-leaf tea per 8oz. cup of water. Then, steep for 3-5 minutes and enjoy.



Green Tea

綠茶

Green tea is particularly popular in China and Japan where it is mainly produced. It is known to be the oldest herbal tea originating around 2737 BC. Before the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), green tea was compressed into cakes. They did not produce loose-leaf tea until the Ming Dynasty. Back then, only the wealthy and royalty could afford to drink green tea, since it was so expensive and rare. However, by the 1400s, regular commoners in China started drinking the beverage as well. Now it is most popular in Asia, but many people around the world still drink this type of tea.



There are now thousands of varieties of green tea and it remains one of the most popular types of tea to consume.

Green tea is known to be one of the healthiest beverages to drink. Because of the little oxidation that green tea leaves go through, many of the polyphenols and catechins are preserved. Many studies are still being done to see whether or not green tea has an effect on preventing and treating cancer. Other studies have confirmed that green tea can improve blood flow, help lower cholesterol, prevent a variety of hearing-related problems, and increase activity in the working-memory area of the brain.

The best green tea is made from the sweetest, newest buds and tips that come from the top of the plant. The secret is knowing when to pick the leaves. The best time to harvest green tea is in spring. After the best leaves are harvested, they start the process of withering and then are either steamed or pan fired. This step heats up the leaves to prevent the leaf from oxidizing anymore. The leaves are then

rolled and dried again to be ready for steeping. Different kinds of green tea can vary in steep time and water temperature. A good temperature for the water is around 175 degrees Fahrenheit. Any hotter than 190 degrees or lower than 150 degrees will result in a bitter tasting tea. About 1 teaspoon of loose-leaf tea can be used for an 8oz. cup of water. The steeping times for green tea are very short. Most do not require steeping for more than a minute or the tea will become bitter.



Rooibos Tea

红茶

Rooibos tea is known to be a sweeter tea, and sometimes nutty. It comes from a South African Red Bush and it is also called red tea. Rooibos tea looks different than other types of teas in that it is made up of needle-like leaves. It originated in South Africa where the people of Cape were making tea from the local rooibos plant. A man named Carl Thunberg discovered the making of these leaves in 1772 and was able to make this type of tea more widespread. Ever since, the process of

making rooibos tea has been refined and perfected making it a popular tea around the world.

One characteristic that makes rooibos tea unique is that fact that it does not contain any caffeine. This is why many people drink rooibos tea right before bed; it does not contain any caffeine so it is a tea known to help relax people. Rooibos tea is also very high in ascorbic acid, which contains many antioxidants. These antioxidants help protect the body by fighting off free radicals. Rooibos tea is also known to help with nervous tension, allergies, and digestive problems. Lastly, this type of tea contains many minerals such as magnesium, calcium, zinc, and iron making it a very healthy beverage option.

Like most other teas, rooibos tea goes under a similar process in which it is oxidized to produce the reddish-brown color and to enhance the flavor. Before this process however, the tealeaves are purposefully bruised. This bruising eventually triggers the oxidation process

and then left to dry. As the tealeaves are drying, the unique needle-like structure starts to take form. The leaves are now ready to be packaged and steeped. To make the perfect cup of rooibos tea, boil water and use 1.5 teaspoons of tea per 8oz. cup of water. Steep the tea for 5-6 minutes. Do not steep any longer or the leaves will become bitter. A trick is to blend rooibos tea with either green or white tea to get both the best flavor and the best health benefits.



Oolong Tea 乌龙茶

Oolong tea is also known as wulong tea. No one knows for sure how oolong tea originated, but there are three well-known theories. According to the first theory, the “tribute tea” theory, when loose-leaf started to become popular during the Ming Dynasty, the name oolong was derived from the Dragon-Phoenix tea cakes that were popular before loose-leaf tea. Oolong replaced the name from Dragon-Phoenix because of its dark, long and curly complexion. The second theory is the “Wuyi” theory in which oolong tea was discovered in the Wuyi Mountain of the

Fujian province. And lastly, according to the third theory, the “Anxi” theory, oolong tea was named after the Anxi oolong tea plant. This plant was discovered by a man named Sulong, whose name was mistaken as Wulong.

Oolong tealeaves are partially oxidized, so they still contain many antioxidants that make it a healthy tea to drink. One study has suggested that oolong tea can help prevent or treat obesity, diabetes, and weight loss since it helps lower blood sugar. Oolong tea also contains caffeine, which can help increase awareness and energy. It has also been known to help people with skin conditions in addition to improving bone structure. There are still many studies being done today to see if oolong tea, along with other types of teas, can help prevent cancer.

Oolong tealeaves go through a different process than other teas. After the leaves are picked, they are intentionally bruised by shaking. Then, when the leaves are drying, the edges of the leaves turn a reddish color

and the surface turns a yellowish color due to the oxidation. The degree to which the leaves are oxidized varies, and once that process is done, the leaves are pan fired to create a semi-oxidized tea. The different process oolong tealeaves go through creates an interesting look to the leaves when they are finished. They are either rolled into curly leaves, or wrap-curled into small beads that have a tail. To brew a perfect cup of oolong tea, heat water to 195-205 degrees Fahrenheit. Use 2 teaspoons of loose-leaf tea per 8oz. cup of water and steep 3-10 minutes. Oolong tea is also known to be one of the types of teas that improves with rebrewing. In other words, the tealeaves can be used several times.



Black Tea

黑茶

Black tea is known to be one of the strongest teas in flavor. It can actually retain its flavor for many years, unlike other types of teas, which is why black tea was, and still is, very popular for trading. No one really knows for sure how black tea originated. The most well known theory is the Wuyi theory. During the Ming Dynasty, compressed teacakes had been very popular and were made in the Wuyi Mountains. However, the emperor decided that he wanted to switch to loose-leaf tea instead. Therefore, his workers made

several attempts in producing high quality loose-leaf tea for their emperor. During the whole process, the tealeaves would turn red due to oxidation. Thus, black tea was discovered. This is why the Chinese refer to black tea as red tea.

Black tea contains a high level of polyphenols and catechins, which classifies it as a healthy beverage to drink. It is known to contain an insignificant number of calories, protein, sodium, and fat. Studies have also shown that black tea lowered the risk of ovarian cancer in women. Black tea also contains a substantial amount of caffeine, which depending on preference could be a good or bad thing. There has been no evidence that black tea lowers the risk of breast, stomach, or colorectal cancer. Overall, though, black tea is thought of as a healthy alternative to other beverages containing a high amount of caffeine.

This type of tea is the only tea that is fully oxidized, so it is exposed to the most oxygen. The process of producing black tea first involves withering to lose moisture.

The leaves are then rolled, shaped and left to oxidize. When changed to a red, copper color, they are fired in a hot flat pan. This results in a very strong flavor. Once the leaves are dried, they are ready to be used to make black tea. The perfect cup of black tea needs to have water to be almost boiling, around 200 degrees Fahrenheit. About 1.5 teaspoons of loose-leaf tea can be used to steep an 8oz. cup of water for 3-4 minutes. Black tea can become bitter very easily, so be sure to follow these instructions carefully.



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About Me

I am currently a third year at Rochester Institute of Technology studying Biomedical Photographic Communications with a Minor in Criminal Justice. I hope to one day have a career in either Microscopy or Forensic Photography.

Oh, and I love tea.



jis9679@rit.edu
jordansalkinphotography.com

