

Stock up Your Tea Cabinet

The industrial revolution changed our lives drastically. It caused such a dramatic shift in the way we work and live, and our modern stressors are extremely different than those of our ancestors. While I'm not worried that I'll run into a lion on my way to the bank, I am concerned that the air we breathe and the water we drink are both not as clean as they used to be. The soil in which our food grows is depleted, and our food isn't as nutritious as it once was. But there's no need to become discouraged and depressed. There are many things we can do to help our bodies deal with the modern world, and the first of those is to sit down and have a cup of tea!



Having a cup of tea may not strike you as the most effective way to fight the degradation of our planet, but it's one of the best ways to detoxify your body and spirit and nurture your whole being. All tea is beneficial. Green tea is a powerful antioxidant, which makes it important to overall cell health and may mean less chance of heart disease, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, and other degenerative diseases. Black tea's anti-oxidative, anti-inflammatory, and vasodilating effects can help protect against cardiovascular diseases. But the kind of tea I find really exciting is herbal. It doesn't necessarily come in a teabag and is best when you brew it yourself.

Most people think of herbal teas as those rather bland options available at restaurants or in the pretty boxes in the supermarket coffee aisle. These herb teas can be tasty and fragrant, and they are indeed the first step to kicking the coffee habit. But real herbal tea is made from a combination of roots, leaves, berries, bark, seeds, and volatile oils of plants. Herb teas are as ancient as time itself. Unlike dunking a cellophane-wrapped teabag from the grocery store in a microwaved mug, the act of preparing, brewing and drinking homemade herb teas invokes the magical elemental qualities of fire, air, water, and earth, and connects you with your ancestors and others who walked this planet thousands of years ago.

It can all seem slightly intimidating at

first, but it's easy to begin exploring the wondrous world of herbal tea. Not ready to begin brewing my own herbs right away, I started out by finding pre-bagged herb teas I had read about and wanted to investigate.

Sometimes the herbs find me. One of my yoga students asked me if I had ever heard of Holy Basil, and I had to admit that I hadn't. I kept meaning to look it up but never did, and at the Fourth Annual Southeast Women's Herbal Conference I just attended, I found out I had been drinking Holy Basil tea for the past month! I just knew it by its Indian name, Tulsi. Tulsi tea is made of the leaves of the Holy Basil plant, and according to Jessica Godino, an Asheville, North Carolina-based licensed acupuncturist and herbal teacher at the Appalachian School of Herbal Medicine, Holy Basil has adaptogenic qualities. Adaptogens increase the body's resistance to stress, trauma, anxiety, and fatigue and are known for their ability to balance endocrine hormones and the immune system. Adaptogens are proposed to have a normalizing effect on the body, capable of either toning down the activity of hyperfunctioning systems or strengthening the activity of hypofunctioning systems.

Godino cites Holy Basil's ability to lower cortisol levels, stabilize blood sugar levels, and even counteract menopausal insomnia. A nervine tonic, it supports the nervous system and reduces the effects of stress. I found it in the health food store combined with the flavors of peach and pomegranate.

A tea I'm recently fond of is Oatstraw. This mild-tasting tea can also be found in the health food store pre-bagged. Another adaptogenic herb, Oatstraw is purported to nourish the nervous and hormonal systems. It is rich in the minerals calcium and phosphorus, and according to the Red Moon Herbs 2008 Catalog, it also has an abundance of B-complex and other vitamins, minerals, and micronutrients.

Herbs are so nutritious because the roots of these plants grow very deeply in the earth, where erosion and environmental pollutants have not degraded the soil.

Many herbs take a long time, years even, to settle before they can be harvested. When shopping for herbs, it is wise to choose a reliable source, to double-check that they are organic and wild grown, and to make sure they haven't been sprayed with any pesticides, fungicides, or irradiated on their way into the country.

Another tea worth mentioning and drinking is tea brewed from the nettle plant. This plant has very high levels of minerals, especially, calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium, phosphorous, manganese, silica, iodine, silicon, sodium, and sulfur. It provides chlorophyll and tannin and is a good source of vitamin C, beta-carotene, and B-complex vitamins. Nettles have high levels of easily absorbable amino acids. They even contain 10 percent protein, more than any other vegetable!

Some of the possible benefits from drinking nettle tea daily include strong kidneys and adrenals, relief from hay fever and other allergies, increased energy, libido, and fertility, strong bones, and healthy skin, teeth, and gums. The taste of nettle tea is like a strong stock of a rich, deep, green plant essence, and it's perfect for whenever you feel run down, tired, or irritable.

This is really just a dip of the toe into the deep ocean of herbal teas. The best way to learn is to start tasting. However, a word of caution is that herbs can be gentle but serious medicine. So if you're taking any prescription drugs or have a compromised immune system, you may want to consult your healthcare professional before you indulge. Having more than three cups a day of any herb tea is considered medicinal use of that herb, so moderation is recommended. When you're ready to venture off the beaten path of pre-packaged teas, start with the Internet, a modern way to embark on an exotic and ancient adventure. I raise my teacup as a toast to your journey. Bon voyage.

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