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Come to Tea: An Elegant Garden Gathering

By Debbie Rodgers

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Perhaps nothing says "garden party" like having afternoon tea outdoors. It's a charming reminder of bygone days and childhood make-believe. Outdoor spaces of all kinds, including balconies, can be successfully adapted to a tea party.

Tea parties span generations and will be enjoyed by your most sophisticated women friends or all the giggling little girls of your acquaintance.

What makes an elegant tea party? Look at these factors.

Flowers

Plan to hold your tea party when your garden is in its fullest bloom -- perhaps it's lilac time, June roses, or peony season. Be sure to cut some of the blooms for the tea table vases. If you don't have a garden, buy an armful of flowers at a farmers' market or stop by a country ditch and pick bunches of wild daisies and Queen Anne's lace.

Invitations

Send handwritten notes by snail mail. Your guests will recognize your party as an elegant affair and dress accordingly! Typically, tea is held around 4 p.m. -- perfect for day-blooming flowers. Include an invitation for the little ones to bring along a doll or teddy friend.

Table Setting

The more elegant, the better. Stash the paper table covering and the plastic glasses just for today. Instead, use a crisp linen tablecloth, pressed cloth napkins and your best bone china cups and saucers. If it's a little girls' party, you might want to invest in two or three miniature tea sets.

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Try to have adequate seating for everyone. Consider setting your straight-back indoor dining chairs outdoors. They can add an elegant touch, whether left unadorned or covered with flowered chintz.

Hats

Encourage all of your guests to wear hats -- big-brimmed, floppy and flowered. If the party is for little girls, collect old hats, scarves and silk flowers at a thrift shop, yard sale or discount store. Make decorating the hats a fun activity at the party. You can also include a box of flowery cast-offs for dressing up. Include "grown-up" shoes and old jewellery -- anything that will make the little ones feel elegant. Tea time is a fun way to introduce young ones to "elegant party" manners.

Food

Other than teaspoons, no cutlery should be required at tea. All sandwiches and sweets should be dainty finger-food. Try sandwiches of watercress, cucumber, or egg with the crusts removed and cut in quarters. Sugar cookies and petit fours are traditional sweets. You can substitute mini-cupcakes or tiny tarts.

Tea

One of the first things that I learned in seventh grade home economics class was how to brew a proper pot of hot tea, but that was many years ago. I suspect that tea-making is becoming a lost art.

Tea is actually the common name of one plant: *Camillia sinesis*. The three basic types of tea -- black, green and oolong -- are distinguished by the amount of oxidization that the tea leaves have undergone. The more than 3,000 varieties of tea in the world are all derived from those three basic types.

Herbal teas -- more properly, tisane or infusion -- are made from a wide variety of flowers, herbs, barks, berries, fruits and spices.

At a minimum, offer your guests a traditional tea and a caffeine-free herbal choice. Have milk (not cream!), sugar and fresh lemon wedges available.

So, dust off your teacups and your manners and sit down with your girlfriends for a proper tea party. It's a lovely summer interlude!

Debbie Rodgers, the haven maven, owns and operates Paradise Porch, and is dedicated to helping people create outdoor living spaces that nurture and enrich them. Her latest how-to guide "Attracting Butterflies to Your Home and Garden" is now available on her web site. Visit her at

and get a free report on "Eight easy ways to create privacy in your outdoor space". Mail to

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Tea Garden Mint

By Peter Vermeeren

Tea Garden Mint is a delicious combination of Garden Tea and Mint that provides a gentle and calming drink. This delicious combination has many healthy benefits and can aid the digestive system, nervous system and help prevent sleep deprivation.

The idea of sitting in your Garden sipping Tea Garden Mint tea is appealing and can be very relaxing at the end of the working day, or on the weekend, while recuperating from a busy week. It is essential that our bodies receive at least one day of rest a week and Tea Garden Mint is one way of assisting your body in achieving full relaxation.

Tea Garden Mint does not only take away the winter blues, it can also be turned into a soothing summer drink that helps you beat the heat. By adding a small amount of ginger to Tea Garden Mint Tea, allowing it to cool and adding some ice blocks, suddenly you have delicious and healthy summer refreshment.

Herbal teas have long been used as a medicinal treatment throughout the centuries and throughout the world. Today you can find tea grown in China, Egypt, England and the United States of America, allowing for a greater choice of teas to purchase.

Tea Garden Mint Tea is essentially a combination of herbs that have been specifically chosen for their qualities. Combined these herbs can produce amazing effects and when combined with other healthy lifestyle choices, can have life changing effects.

If you are interested in growing your own Mint, you will need to clear an area of your garden and prepare the soil, plant the mint and then ensure that the mint is well watered and cared for in the months during its growth. If you don't have a garden, rest assured that most Tea Garden Mint Teas are grown in natural environments.

Mint prefers a shady environment and grows best in moist rich soil. There are hundreds of variety of Mint, so you should chose the mint that best reflects the desired taste that you are seeking. Some of the varieties of mint include, spearmint, apple mint, chocolate mint, Moroccan mint and peppermint.

If using Tea Garden Mint for aiding in Sleep deprivation, you should prepare and drink your Tea Garden Mint Tea one hour prior to when you intend to go to sleep, as this will allow your body time to soak the tea up into its system and begin to relax the bodies muscles.

Peter Vermeeren is the owner and webmaster of:

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