

5/10/2019



Tea in the Garden — Home Grown Flower and Herbal Teas  
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Tea is one of the most popular beverages in the world. It has shaped cultures, defined lifestyles, and even started wars. There is nothing more comforting than a cup of hot tea, or as refreshing as a glass of herbal iced tea.

Instead of perusing pricey tea shops to pick out your favorite teas, why not grow your own? Using homegrown edible herbs and flowers to make your own personalized teas, or tisanes, is easy and fun. You may already have some of the basics in your garden. Get ready to snip and steep!

Herbal teas, which do not contain caffeine, are simply infusions of edible flowers and herbs in water. Making tea from fresh ingredients grown in your own garden is a way to experiment with flavor and fragrance. A theme can be created by blending different ingredients, such as floral, fruity, woody, refreshing, or soothing.

Let's get started. Organic gardening is a must in creating the perfect cup of tea; your plants should be free of chemical pesticides and fertilizer. No expensive equipment is needed—just a tea pot or French press and a 1-gallon lidded glass container. Aside from boiling water and edible flowers or herbs, the main ingredient is sunshine!

Your tea garden should have a few basic plants to supply the following tea flavors. Citrus: lemon grass (*Cymbopogon citratus*), lemon verbena (*Aloysia citrodora*), lemon scented geranium (*Pelargonium crispum*). Mint: mint (*mentha spp*), calamint (*Clinopodium spp*), 'Petite Delight' bee balm (*Monarda didyama* 'Petite Delight'). Earl Grey: lemon bergamot (*Monarda citriodora*), lavender (*Lavandula spp*). Licorice: anise hyssop (*Agastache spp*). Herbal: sage (*Salvia spp*), marjoram (*Origanum spp*), thyme (*Thymus spp*), rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*), pineapple sage (*Salvia elegans*). Floral: German chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla* 'Zloty Lan'), lavender, rose

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(*Rosa rugosa*). Of course, there are many other flowers that can be used in tea, including calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), hibiscus (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*), dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*), sweet violet (*Viola odorata*), viola (*Violet tricolor* or *Violet comuta*), borage (*Borago officinalis*), and jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*, or *Jasminum sambac*), to name a few.

Situate your tea garden in full or partial sun and in well-drained soil. Tight planting is okay; you will just need to prune and pick more often. Pots and containers also work well. Water consistently. As an added benefit, plants in your tea garden will attract bees.

Always plan to harvest flowers and herbs early in the morning to avoid wilting and bitter taste. Dip your cuttings in water to remove dirt and critters, then dry. Place in a clean container of fresh cool water to use during that same day for making tea.

Ready for a quick cup or glass of homemade tea? Here is an easy recipe. Enjoy!

Chamomile Lavender Mint Iced Tea: 1 cup loosely packed fresh mint leaves, 2 tablespoons dried or fresh culinary lavender, 1 ½ to 2 tablespoons dried or fresh chamomile flowers. Crush mint leaves, put in a 1-gallon lidded jar, add lavender and chamomile. Fill jar with cold water, cover and refrigerate for 6 hours. Pour through a cheesecloth-lined colander into a pitcher. Add ice and garnish with a mint leaf and a lavender stem.

As with all good things, indulge only occasionally in a cup of homegrown tea. If you are pregnant or nursing, or have allergies or other medical conditions, be sure to check with your health care provider before consuming flower or herbal tea.

Tea Time!

On Saturday, May 11, from 9:00 to 11:00, Master Gardeners will be holding their Second Saturday Open Garden Day at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, 6699 Campus Dr. in Placerville. Staff will be on hand to discuss edible flowers and herbs, shade structures, and critter control. Also, the Succulent Garden will be open for questions and plant diagnosis.

*For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512), or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See [http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration\\_Garden](http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden) for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see [http://ucanr.edu/master\\_gardener\\_e-news](http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news). Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.*