

YUMMY NORTHWEST

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JUST YOUR CUP OF TEA

Winter is upon us – and whether that means snow, rain, or balmy weather where you live, no doubt the very idea of the season makes you want to stay cozy. National Hot Tea Month arrives in the nick of time.

What is especially wonderful about tea is that you can enjoy it in any kind of environment. Cuddle up with a favorite book and drink it at home. Join your friends at a restaurant – any restaurant – and sip and chat. Be hip and try a tea latté on trendy Queen Anne Avenue in Seattle. Enjoy the mellow mood of an international teahouse. Dress up and feel special at a pricey Afternoon Tea laid out under crystal chandeliers in a downtown hotel.

Tea has been around since someone first steeped intriguing-looking leaves in a container of hot water. Don't wait any longer to brew your own pot. But then come back quickly to enjoy this month's journey through some tearooms of the Pacific Northwest.

A quick brew of history

Drinking tea may date back to 2737 BC in China, though the first comprehensive book, "Ch'a Ching," was written by Lu Yu in 780 AD. Buddhist monks probably brought Chinese tea to Japan in the 6th century, while Indian legend says the founding monk of Zen visited China in 520 AD and afterward encouraged tea drinking in his native Madras.

Portugal appears to be the first European country to trade with China, bringing tea to Europe, but the Dutch were the first to take it to America, to their New Amsterdam colony, which we now know as New York. Tea arrived in England in 1652, and quickly became part of English culture.

In 1791, the Lady Washington from the Pacific Northwest was the first American ship to land in



A few tea facts

There are four main tea varieties:

- black
- oolong
- green
- white (rare)

In the 16th century, tea cost \$100/pound.

Until the 19th century, most people drank green tea. This could spoil during shipping, however, and by the time it reached America, it was not in the best condition. A process was developed to give tea longevity, and thus the familiar black-leaf variety came into being.

The teabag is thought to have originated in 1908 when a New York merchant sent samples of teas to his customers in small silk bags. Some folks steeped these and found them convenient.

Japan. Among other things, tea became a regular trade item. Because of its location, Seattle quickly became the nation's gateway to Asia. In 1843, three Japanese sailors survived a shipwreck and came ashore at Cape Flattery, Ore. No doubt they soon insisted on some tea.

Pacific Northwest Indians drank teas made from various parts of local plants: Dewberry leaves; Snowberry bark; Orange Honeysuckle bark; rosehips, leaves, and peeled twigs of the Nootka Rose. The Coastal Salish people drank a marsh-grown, smoked tea that reportedly tasted like Lapsang Souchong.

Today, tea is not far behind coffee in popularity with Pacific Northwest hot beverage drinkers.

Why Tea?

"Why do you so much like tea?" he suddenly asked us, as we waited for our restaurant lunch. We looked at each other, thought a minute, and then smiled. "Here's why", we said:

Tea is beautiful to look at
It is good for what might ail us
It gives us a high, but not a big one
It has fragrances that lift the spirit
It is a slow-down thing to drink
It invites awareness and reflection
It is beautiful to look at

Then we added this out of benevolence:

Coffee has its place, of course,
with things chocolate, or with
pork chops and warm applesauce,
or when life throws all-nighters at you.

(Give us tea, though, please
with, and before and after – everything else!)

Carolyn Dunn
Astoria, Oregon

Begin with a simple tea

"It's a little bit of heaven," one Yummy reader said when she described her impression of **Floating Leaves**, a Chinese teahouse in the Ballard area of Seattle. There are no windows looking out on the hectic activity of nearby Market Street, providing a peaceful atmosphere for meditation over a cup of tea. The teahouse also hosts classes and events centering around Chinese teas.

Tea drinkers can find an assortment of teas and a few snacks in the Wallingford neighborhood at **Teahouse Kuan Yin**. Formerly an international teahouse, Kuan Yen, under new ownership, now feels more like a simple coffeehouse. It's still a nice place to sit, but you can find more interesting tea places elsewhere.

For example, the **Tea Cup** on the top of Queen Anne in Seattle is not only an enjoyable place to sit but also a great place to learn about tea. The employees eagerly share their knowledge, allowing customers to sniff teas, ask questions, and taste. Local teas are available, fragrant blends such as Elliott Bay Sunset Organic and Orcas Island Herbal Spice. Exotic imports are as tasty as their names imply: Thé Caramel, Violette, Phoenix Dragon Pearl Jasmine.

The **TeaZone** in Portland's Pearl District allows customers to enjoy displays of teapots from around the world as well as sit comfortably with a warming cup of their tea of choice.

Also in Portland is the elegant **Heathman Hotel** where seasonal Afternoon Tea awaits. A favorite treat here is the minuscule Opera Cake that appears among other teatime favorites.

For a quick tea fix while you're in Seattle at the Pike Place Market, stop at the **Crumpet Shop** where tea plays a secondary but vital role next to fresh crumpets. Don't mess around here: Get the daily tea blend and eat your hot crumpet – crispy outside, tender inside – with butter.

There are many, many more places to enjoy tea in the Pacific Northwest. As always, **Yummy Northwest** hopes to whet your appetite for more adventures.

Get the local scoop

Afternoon Tea at the
Pittock Mansion –
Recipes and
Reminiscences
by the Pittock Mansion
Society

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Tea Rooms Northwest –
Your Guide to Tea
Rooms, Tea Events and
Tea Time Recipes
by Sharron and John de
Montigny

www.teatimeadventures.com

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Learn more about teas
and some shops that
serve them

Crumpet Shop
Seattle
(206) 682-1598

Floating Leaves
Seattle
floatingleaves.com

Heathman Hotel
Portland
www.heathmanhotel.com

The Tea Cup
Seattle
www.seattleteacup.com

Teahouse Kuan Yin
Seattle
(206) 632-2055

The TeaZone
Portland
www.teazone.com

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Commercial tea
companies (just a few)

Market Spice Tea
Pike Place Market
Seattle
www.marketspice.com

Oregon Chai
Portland
www.oregonchai.com

Stash Tea Company
Tigard, Ore.
www.stashtea.com

A recipe for your very own delicious tea

Individual preferences for tea are very personal and many drinkers blend their own mixtures at home to create a flavor they particularly like. Successful blends are the result of experimentation and tasting, trial, and error. A small amount of a good quality tea or a few leaves of a scented tea such as Jasmine or Tarry Souchong can turn an ordinary tea into something quite special.

Add perhaps a dash of Assam to Ceylon for a robust breakfast tea, a little Lapsang to Assam for a brunch or lunchtime brew, or a few leaves of Jasmine to China black for a light and refreshing afternoon blend. The possibilities are endless.

To clean a teapot

Never put a teapot into a dishwashing machine or a bowlful of soapy water. Pour away the tea, rinse with clean water, and turn upside-down to drain. Dry outside but not inside. To remove tannin from a glazed pot, or from glass or silver, fill with a solution of two tablespoons of baking soda and boiling water, and soak overnight. In the morning, empty, rinse thoroughly, and leave to dry.

If using a Yixing unglazed pot, never wash or clean the inside. The pot will take a little time to "settle" into its use for a particular tea, and the lining it acquires is important to the success of the brew.

from "The Tea Companion" by Jane Pettigrew

DIY decaffeinated tea

Most caffeine in tea enters the hot water during the first 60 seconds of brewing. You can make your own decaf by steeping tea for 1 minute in one cup, then steeping the same leaves for 2 to 5 minutes in another cup. This second cup is 97 percent caffeine free.

About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest. Online at rainydayrose.com.

Contact the editor

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