



Solar tea is best under the sun

I could have entitled it Dr. Tea's Solar Journal: notes and formulas scrawled in ballpoint pen over 13 months.

After 15 experiments, 51 hours of sunlight, nearly 29 quarts of water and 110 tea bags, I've come up with the best iced tea under the sun.

The refreshing results didn't come easy. The sun didn't always cooperate and Mother Nature sometimes dizzied on my parade of tea concoctions. I often drank my mistakes when they weren't dribbled down the kitchen sink.

Each experiment began the same way: wide-mouth solar tea jar filled with water, from 30 ounces to just under two quarts; tea bags immersed in water, tags removed; jar placed in back yard under sun, from four to six hours.

Each experiment ended the same way: tea bags squeezed against inside of jar, then discarded; cold tap water added, except on several occasions; ice cubes popped into tall glass, followed by tea, sugar or sweetener and lemon juice, except on several occasions, stirred in.

I used regular and family-size tea bags. I used all three types of tea, but mostly relied on the plain black tea available at every store: orange pekoe. I tried flavored tea, the mint variety. I even sampled expensive herbal tea, which for years has been popular in Europe.

one quart for the tea to brew in, one quart to stir in.

By experiment No. 8, I had the solar time down pat: 4 1/4 hours. I learned that constant bright sunlight wasn't required. While an overcast sky that produced cool breezes inhibited brewing, passing clouds didn't — as long as the temperature was warm.

By experiment No. 12, I deduced that nine regular-size tea bags produced the best results.

By experiment No. 15, I was sure I had the correct blend of tea for the best flavor: orange pekoe and mint.

I also made several other discoveries: The best time to brew solar tea is between noon and 5 p.m. Family-size tea bags offer less leeway to experiment for taste. It takes less artificial sweetener to sweeten tea than sugar. There's no need to refrigerate tea until retreating for the night. Good iced tea shouldn't cost more than three cents a glass.

The biggest disappointment came during experiments No. 10 and No. 11. I tried herbal tea for the first time. I purchased a brand that promised to be especially nice over ice. The ingredients included hibiscus and chamomile flowers, spearmint and peppermint leaves, orange and lemon peel, rose hips and cinnamon.

Nice Over Ice contained no artificial coloring, no artificial flavoring, no preservatives and no caffeine. Unfortunately, it didn't taste like tea.

Now, without further glowing reports, I present the best iced tea under the sun:

BY EXPERIMENT No. 7, I arrived at the correct amount of water to use:

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