

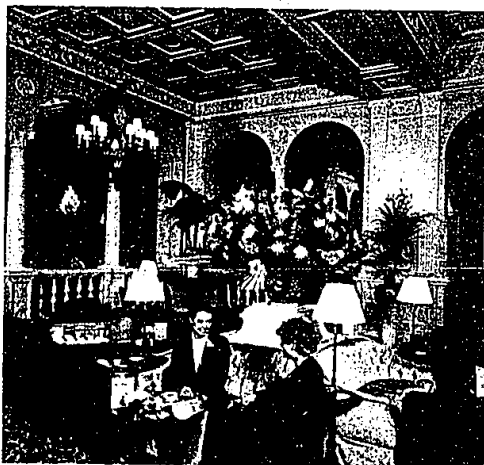
IT'S TEATIME!

Yes, indeed! All over the country, in the finest hotels and restaurants, the hours between three and five are being devoted to serving that most gracious and relaxed of meals — afternoon tea. In the elegant, flower-filled lounge of the Mayfair Regent Hotel on New York City's Park Avenue, for instance, it's the time to relax with friends and enjoy quiet conversation "over the teacups." Guests are offered a choice of teas, brewed in individual white teapots, carefully kept warm under pretty tea cozies. Sandwiches are made with the thinnest of breads, scones are accompanied by an individual jar of strawberry jam and a little crock of "hard" whipped cream. A selection of luscious cakes is also available, including a delectable pear tart.

Afternoon tea is a delightful way to entertain in your own home. Do it on a weekend or holiday after the workaday week is over. Get out your Sunday-best china and linens; splurge on some pretty flowers. Refreshments can be as simple or as elaborate as you wish. Serve traditionally paper-thin sandwiches filled with cucumber slices and watercress sprigs or spread with anchovy paste. Or break with tradition and serve an array of open-faced canapé-style sandwiches. Either kind should start out with the perfect slice for tea sandwiches — very thin bread — white and whole wheat — and just right for tea sandwiches. Directions for these eye-catching, palate-pleasing tidbits follow.

For the pièce de resistance you couldn't do better than to reproduce the Mayfair's pear tart. Start with a sheet of frozen puff pastry to make a flaky tart shell. This is then filled with a creamy custard, topped with fresh pear slices and glazed with apricot preserves.

Make sure that the tea you serve is freshly made, hot and fragrant. Start with a good quality tea to insure that you'll have a brew that relaxes and revives at the same time. Just follow the simple rules below to bring out the fine qualities and full flavor of the particular tea you choose.



THE PERFECT POT OF TEA

- Use a teapot, preheating it by rinsing it out with hot water.
- Bring freshly drawn cold tap water to a full rolling boil.
- Put the tea (one teabag or one teaspoon of loose tea per serving) into warmed teapot.
- Pour the bubbling water (about 5-1/2 ounces per serving) over the tea.
- Cover and let stand 3 to 5 minutes.
- Remove teabags and stir before pouring.
- If you like tea less strong, add a little hot water after the brewing period.
- Serve with milk (not cream) or with lemon slices, and sugar to taste.

FRENCH FRESH PEAR TART

- 1 Frozen Puff Pastry Sheet
Yolks of three large eggs

- 1/3 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 cup milk
- 1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 ripe pear, peeled, cored, halved and thinly sliced crosswise
- 1/3 cup apricot preserves, strained and heated

Thaw puff pastry for 20 minutes, then unfold. On a lightly floured surface, roll one sheet to a 10-1/2 x 17-1/2 inch rectangle. Trim edges so rectangle measures an even 10 x 17 inches. From one short end cut two 1-1/4 inch wide strips. From a long side, cut four 1-1/4 inch wide strips. Moisten the top of all the pastry strips and a 1-1/4 inch wide border around the outside of the pastry rectangle with water. Arrange pastry strips in two layers around edges of rectangle, moist strips down, cutting when necessary, to fit. Press firmly with fingers; then press edges with tines of a fork to seal. Using a sharp knife, make shallow diagonal slashes 1/2 inch apart around pastry border. Transfer tart shell to baking sheet and prick the inside very well with the tines of a fork. Line with wax paper and fill with rice or dried beans. Freeze 30 minutes. Bake in a preheated 425° oven for 10 to 12 minutes or until puffed and golden. Remove, discard wax paper and rice and cool shell completely.

In a bowl, beat egg yolks, sugar and flour together until smooth. In a medium sized saucepan, over moderately high heat, bring milk to a boil. Stirring constantly with a wire whisk, gradually add milk to egg mixture. Return egg-milk mixture to pan, add vanilla and heat over moderately low heat for 5 to 7 minutes, stirring constantly until mixture thickens and is the consistency of a thick pudding. Pour immediately into a bowl and put a sheet of plastic wrap directly on the surface of the cream. Chill at least 1 hour or until very cold.

Spread cream filling evenly over the inside of the baked tart shell. Top with pear slices and brush with apricot preserves to glaze. Refrigerate for 2 to 3 hours and serve. Makes 1 tart, 8 servings.

TEA SANDWICHES

Using a sharp knife, cut crusts off very thin white and whole wheat bread. Cut bread slices into ovals, diamonds, triangles, squares and other fancy shapes. Top with any of the following:

- Spread with cream cheese and top with red salmon caviar.
- Spread with cream cheese and top with a thin slice of smoked salmon and a sprig of dill.
- Spread with cream cheese or butter and top with sieved egg yolk, black lumpfish caviar and sieved egg white arranged in a stripe pattern.
- Spread with butter and top with thin-slices of cucumber and/or tomato; sprinkle with salt and pepper.
- Spread with Blue Cheese Butter* and top with thin-sliced red radishes and capers.
- *BLUE CHEESE BUTTER: Mix 1/2 cup softened butter with 4 ounces crumbled blue cheese. Mix until smooth.
- Spread with Herbed Watercress Butter* and top with sliced cherry tomatoes and a sprig of watercress or thin pieces of smoked salmon.
- *HERBED WATERCRESS BUTTER: In a food processor, put 1/2 cup softened butter, 1 cup packed watercress leaves and 3, 3 inch long pieces of scallion or green onion. Cover and process until smooth. Add salt and pepper to taste.
- Spread with Strawberry Cream Cheese* and fresh strawberries.
- *STRAWBERRY CREAM CHEESE: Beat 1/4 cup strawberry preserves with 6 ounces softened cream cheese.
- Spread with Ham and Almond Paté* and top with sliced black olives and a sprig of dill.
- *HAM AND ALMOND PATE: Put 1/4 cup chopped almonds, 1/4 pound boiled ham, 3 ounces softened cream cheese, 1/4 teaspoon dry mustard, 1/8 teaspoon paprika, 1/8 teaspoon pepper, 1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce, 2 drops Tabasco sauce and 2 to 3 tablespoons sour cream into food processor. Cover and process until smooth.
- Spread with Gingered Cream Cheese* and top with kiwi-fruit slices.
- *GINGERED CREAM CHEESE: Mix 3 ounces softened cream cheese with 1-1/2 tablespoons finely chopped preserved ginger and 1 tablespoon ginger syrup.
- Spread with Curry-Chutney Butter* and top with a piece of thin-sliced boiled ham.
- *CURRY-CHUTNEY BUTTER: Mix 1/2 cup softened butter with 3/4 teaspoon curry powder and 1-1/2 tablespoons chopped chutney.