

January: a perfect time for hot tea



RUTH MOSSOK JOHNSTON

There really is a National Hot Tea Month, and it's in January - just in time for this cold winter weather. Ignite your creative fluids and do "Tea" at home, a nice alternative to doing-lunch, and easier on the pocketbook after the Holidays!

An Anglophile at heart, I do love my tea. I have my specific favorites, as in all foods and beverages - nothing tastes better to me than a really strong black tea, the kind I lived on whilst living in England - perfectly creamed and in a china cup. With trying to avoid heavy doses of caffeine, I allow myself one cup of real strong black tea daily, then I move down a notch to Celestial Seasonings Vanilla Maple - perfectly sugared, then on to herbs the rest of the day.

The history of tea traces back 5,000 years, dating back to 2,737 BC, when

China's Emperor Shen Nung while watching a kettle of boiling water for his dinner, observed leaves from a plant blow and infuse into the boiling water. The aroma being so tantalizing, he tasted the brew, hailed its properties, and since that time, shares in the legend of its discovery.

By the 9th Century, tea in China was proclaimed as a royal beverage and the Japanese Tea Ceremony was established. With a value of twice its weight in silver, tea reached European shores in the middle of the 16th Century. Proclaimed for its medicinal benefits, France sold it in pharmacies and importers marketed it to English Puritans as a medicinal draught. Tea became the rage in the 18th Century - the beverage of Kings and Queens, the topics of poetry and writings, themes of still life paintings and a statement of rebellion in Boston.

Today, tea is iced, infused, and used as an ingredient or a marinade - along with the drinking of a hot "cuppa." The innovative and quality conscious company - Republic of Tea's slogan is "Sip

by Sip not Gulp by Gulp" - this American Zen-ish phrase is not referring to etiquette of the ancient beverage, but to paraphrase its Minister of Leaves, Bill Rosenzweig, it's a slowing down from the frenetic pace of the '80s, no more gulp by gulp running on (the rush of) caffeine in coffee - but a change to a more moderate and appreciative '90s with life lived sip by sip with tea. The Tea Association of the USA Inc. is hoping Bill Rosenzweig is right - as the bulk of the tea consumed by Americans, is over ice.

Black Teas, green teas, oolong teas, herbal teas and flavored teas make up the market that spans over a thousand types and manufactured by numerous companies. A few tea companies to look for:

Republic of Tea, Celestial Seasonings, * St Michael, Twinings, Benchley, Harney and Sons, Ltd., Crabtree & Evelyn, Jacksons of Piccadilly, R.C. Bigelow Inc., John Wagner & Sons, Fortnum and Mason, Stash Tea, and of course, Lipton (which is now selling flavored teas).

*St Michael - One Cup Extra Strong Tea Bags - Rich, Bright and Malty (these are my most sentimental favorite) can be found at Marks and Spencer, (in Devonshire Mall) in Windsor, Canada - phone:519-966-1940, British shops, or in the U.K.

What began as an English afternoon "pick me up" in between meal times developed into tea-time as a social occasion. In England, it is still acceptable to have tea around 11 a.m. (a typical break for the working-class) and afternoon or high tea late in the day. Early tea usually consists of a light snack, perhaps a scone with jam and clotted cream accompanied by a traditional cup of tea. Afternoon Tea (4-5 p.m.) incorporates not only a pot of carefully brewed tea but delicate finger sandwiches, a variety of cakes, gateaus and frosted confections.

High Tea which divides day from night (generally around 6 p.m.) can easily replace dinner - Dickensian in style,

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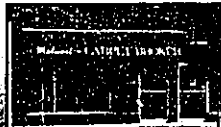
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