

Tea for Two— or Twenty:

Whether you're serving yourself and your partner or the entire kindergarten class, it takes just a little planning to host the perfect tea party. A few tips:

- > Herbal teas are perfect for guests of any age, so stock up on a selection. Favorites include: peppermint leaf, spearmint leaf, chamomile flowers and hibiscus flowers. Consider including some spices and other flavorings, like cinnamon, cloves, orange peel or lemon peel. (Check the safety of specific herbs for use during pregnancy, if any of your guests are expecting.)
- > Coordinate your herbal teas with the snacks you'll be serving, as well as the occasion (bright red hibiscus on Valentine's Day, for example, and a lulling chamomile for a sleepover).
- > Serve your tea in something special, like grandma's tea set or a fun collection of different teacups and saucers that you've put together. Or invite guests to each bring his or her own teacup and saucer—and perhaps a favorite tea herb or herbal tea blend.
- > Provide tea favors for your visitors: decorative tea strainers or mesh tea balls, pretty tea tidies, reusable cotton teabags with a small jar of your signature herbal tea blend.
- > Have a tea tasting, with a handful of sample teas from which guests can choose.
- > Start a tea club, with a regularly scheduled party to share new herbal tea finds. Your book club or other discussion group might be a good match.
- > On a hot summer's day, host an iced-tea party, with big glass pitchers of colorful herbal teas. Blend some of the steeped teas with fruit juice and garnish with fresh fruit slices.

Suggested Menus

- > Gingerbread with lemon yogurt and rosehips tea (especially nice during the winter holidays)
- > Bite-size sandwiches (cream cheese, cucumber and dill on pumpernickel; hummus and cilantro on rye) and a robust mint tea
- > Lavender Lemon Scones (see recipe) or fruit tarts with a collection of herbal favorites: chamomile, lemongrass, hibiscus, and mint
- > Muffins (poppy seed & orange, cinnamon-oatmeal, cardamom-chocolate) and a dandelion or raspberry tea

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TEA PARTY



Herbal Tea Party

Recipes and Tips for...

- > Lavender Lemon Scones
- > Poppy Seed Orange Muffins
- > Tea for Two—or Twenty

... and more!

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Q&A

What's the difference between herbal tea and black or green tea?

Herbal teas are made from the edible herbs, flowers, leaves, bark, roots, or berries of plants. Most don't contain caffeine, and many have been used medicinally throughout history. Black, green, oolong, and white teas, on the other hand, all come from the *Camellia sinensis* plant, which produces thousands of varieties of tea, depending on where the tea is grown, when it's harvested, and how it's processed.

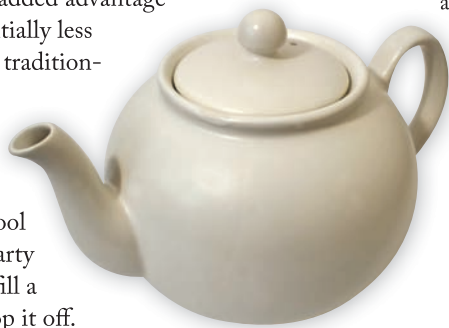
How long should I steep herbal teas?

Experiment to see what you prefer, but if you enjoy a mild tea, start with three to five minutes. For more robust flavor, you can steep longer, say five to ten minutes. But be careful, because over-steeping can eliminate the subtleties of herb blends.

Should I use a teapot or steep my tea right in my cup?

Whichever you prefer. A teapot can enable you to brew enough tea for several people at once, and it will keep your tea warm for a longer time than individual cups.

You can also brew a perfect cup of tea directly in your cup, though, with the added advantage of easier cleanup and potentially less waste. The Chinese, in fact, traditionally brewed their teas in cups rather than pots. By the way, a teacup—more shallow and wide than a coffee cup—allows tea to cool quickly once poured. Tea party etiquette dictates that you fill a teacup $\frac{3}{4}$ full rather than top it off.



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HERBAL TEA PARTY

Looking for a way to celebrate a special event or enliven a routine day? An herbal tea party is appropriate for a surprising number of occasions, such as: a graduation or engagement, a stellar performance (or effort!), a baby shower, any-age birthday, or a holiday (from Valentine's Day to May Day). You might even have a ritual tea party, say every Sunday morning with your neighbor or every Friday after school with your kids and their best friends.

Lavender Lemon Scones

Scones are the ultimate "afternoon tea" snack, traditionally served to the English upper class at three or four each afternoon. ("High tea," on the other hand, was served with cheeses and meats in the evening to the working class.) There are myriad variations—from oat-cinnamon-raisin to cheddar cheese-mustard-cayenne. This recipe yields a delicate, delicious dessert scone.

2 tablespoons dried organic lavender flowers

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar

6 tablespoons butter, softened

1 teaspoon lemon peel (cut and sifted)

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup cream, milk, or buttermilk

2 cups unbleached white flour

1 tablespoon baking powder

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sea salt

Preheat oven to 425°.

Blend the lavender flowers and sugar together in a blender. Pour into a small bowl with the butter, lemon peel, and cream or milk. Blend until creamy. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder, and sea salt. Combine the dry and wet ingredients and knead slightly. On a lightly floured surface, press into a circle, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch thick, and cut into wedges.

Place wedges on a lightly greased baking sheet. Bake until just golden, about 15 to 20 minutes.

Makes about a dozen scones.



Poppy Seed Orange Mini Muffins

Tea and muffins are perfect party partners. This one is tasty enough to serve on its own, but it's also delicious with cream cheese or butter.

2 cups unbleached white flour, sifted

2 tablespoons poppy seeds

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon orange peel (cut and sifted)

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sea salt

2 eggs

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup melted butter or vegetable oil

1 cup brown sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon orange flavor

Preheat oven to 350°.

In a small bowl, combine the flour, poppy seeds, baking powder, orange peel, and sea salt. In a separate bowl, beat together the eggs, butter or oil, sugar and extract. Stir the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients until just blended.

Spoon into lined or lightly oiled muffin tins. Bake until just brown and done through (test with a clean knife in the center). Mini muffins will take about 10 to 15 minutes; regular muffins will take about 20 to 25 minutes.