



Host a Tea Tasting Party

Hosting a tea tasting party is a fun, easy and healthy way to enjoy the company of good friends while learning about tea and experimenting with new blends. This simple guide will provide practical steps and tips for hosting a top tasting experience.

Planning Basics

- 1 Decide what type of tasting you'd like to host.** First, tailor the featured selections to the guests' knowledge of teas. Novice tea drinkers may enjoy a sampling that introduces them to the basic tea types—black, oolong, green, and white—while more experienced tasters may enjoy comparing teas from one group but from different growing regions. You can also add some creative flair to your party themes such as Health and Longevity, Relaxation and De-Stress, Innovative Herbal Infusions, Food & Tea Pairings, and Global Celebrations. You can even make your party more like a wine tasting and feature various Mart-TEA-nis! And unlike a wine tasting, you can drink as much as you want and never have to worry about having a designated driver!
- 2 Determine your guest list.** Send out invitations at least two weeks before your tea tasting party. Consider sending out free online invites through www.evite.com.
- 3 Design a tasting sheet or card.** Specify the type of tea, the growing region and any other relevant harvest or producer information, and a brief description of the tea. Make sure each guest has their own tasting sheet and provide them with instructions to evaluate the teas' aroma, appearance, flavor, texture and finish. Encourage your guests to slow down, pay attention to details and savor. In addition, having a tasting card is especially handy if guests find teas they want to purchase for themselves.

Print out copies of the tasting terms (included in the following pages) for all your guests to use when evaluating and discussing their teas. People sometimes feel less intimidated if they have the vocabulary to describe the nuances. The bottom line is to have fun, get the conversation flowing, and learn something new.

- 4 Decorations for the tasting are as creative as you want to make them.** Whether you go for a more traditional feel or incorporate a global flair, your atmosphere should be light, engaging, casual and comfortable. Scented candles should be avoided so they don't interfere with smelling the teas. Starting off the event off with some tea trivia related to your tasting theme is a great conversation starter. Purchasing a book about teas and tea tasting can also help add to the education and conversation factor.

Selection, Serving and Tasting Tips

- **Party Time:** A tea tasting party can be held any time of day, but if caffeine is a concern, schedule your party as an afternoon affair.
- **Tasting Time:** 90 minutes to 3 hours is a good length of time to enjoy the tasting experience in a comfortable and relaxed way.
- **Food:** Welcome guests with drinks and food before the tasting and end the party with more of the same.
- **Tea Varieties:** Serve 6 different types. That is enough for comparison purposes and it won't fatigue the palate. Use roughly 1/4 cup of each sample per person.
- **Loose or Tea Bags:** Either loose tea leaves or tea bags are fine. If using tea bags, select the ones that contain full leaves, not the tea "dust" that are often found in low-quality brands. Gourmet tea is an affordable luxury so invest in high quality ingredients when entertaining.
- **Tasting Order:** Similar to wine tasting, for the best experience, brew and taste teas progressing from mild to strong flavors.
- **Tea Serving Sets:** Although any tea set will do, using tempered glass teapots and cups will most enhance the visual appeal of your tasting samples as the teas' colors and textures are clearly displayed.
- **Palate Cleansers:** Supplement the "tasting courses" with mild-favored bread or unsalted crackers as any hot or spicy foods may dull the taste buds.
- **Humor:** Encourage your guests to share their thoughts and humor on each tea.
- **After Party Follow Up:** Send an email or note after the party that includes a list of the teas served and where they were purchased so that guests can buy them on their own.

Selection, Serving and Tasting Tips

- **Six different teas – use roughly 1/4 cup of each sample per person.**
- **Small display bowls to showcase the tea samples**
- **Appetizers and post tasting food and drink**
- **Palate cleansers in the form of a plain loaf of bread or unsalted crackers**
- **Tea cups – one per guest**
- **Pitcher of cool water – for rinsing glasses and palates between teas**
- **Dump bucket – for discarding tea before the next pouring**
- **Tasting cards – for describing and recording each tea tasted**
- **Pens and paper**

Basics of Tea Tasting



1 Evaluate the Tea's Flavor Profile

Similar to wine, tea is a drink full of flavor complexities and nuances. Tea is generally described as having a foreground (top note), middle ground, and background flavor. These three flavor dimensions come together to create the tea's flavor profile.

2 Evaluate the Smell of the Dry Leaves

Begin by smelling the dry leaves to determine the tea's "nose" and examine the leaves. Evaluate the leaves to see if they have the following characteristics.

- **Adhesive:** Well-rolled, wiry leaves that tend to cling together when picked up.
- **Attractive:** Well-made, uniform in color, size, and texture.
- **Bloom:** Leaves look lively and have a lustrous quality.
- **Brown:** Leaves are brown in color. Although black is a desirable color for black tea leaves, tippy teas are never totally black due to the presence of the lighter-colored tips, which are desirable.
- **Dull:** Lacking bloom.
- **Dusty:** Leaf tea that contains some tea dust.
- **Golden Tip:** Tea contains golden colored leaf tips. This is desirable.
- **Leafy:** Tea containing larger than average leaves.
- **Leggy:** Tea leaves are long and thin.
- **Stylish:** Leaf of superior appearance containing "tip".
- **Tip:** Pieces of the leaf tip.
- **Tippy:** Teas that contain generous amounts of leaf tip and therefore produce a more flavorful cup.
- **Well-twisted:** Refers to how the leaf was rolled. A leaf that has "twist" is well-rolled.
- **Whiskery:** Leaves covered with a fine hairy fiber. Also described as "hairy".
- **Wiry:** A thin long leaf that has been nicely rolled.

3 Evaluate the Infused Leaf

After steeping the tea in hot water and infusing their flavor in your cup, remove and smell the fragrant leaves. This is an often-overlooked part of the tea tasting experience. Open up you bag and examine the leaves to see if they have the following characteristics.

- **Aroma:** Leaves have a fragrant smell.
- **Bright:** Leaves have a lively reflective quality rather than looking dull.
- **Coppery:** Leaves have a coppery color, usually denoting a good quality tea.
- **Dark:** Leaves are dark or dull in color, sometimes denoting a lesser quality tea.
- **Dull:** Leaves that lack a bright, reflective quality.

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Evaluate the Liquor

The liquid produced by the tea leaves, which is your cup of tea, is sometimes referred to as the tea's liquor. When appreciating a tea's liquor, pay attention to its color and aroma, in addition to its taste.

- **Aroma:** An attractive smell sometimes referred to as “nose” or “bouquet.” High grown teas, such as Darjeeling, are prized for their distinctive aroma.
- **Astringency:** The lively, pungent sensation on your tongue that gives tea its refreshing quality. This is not to be confused with bitterness.
- **Bakey:** An unpleasant taste caused by using very high temperatures during drying (“firing”) the leaves and consequently driving out too much moisture.
- **Biscuity:** A pleasant taste resembling fresh baked bread that can be found in some Assam teas.
- **Bitter:** An unpleasant bitter taste.
- **Body:** How the tea liquor feels in your mouth. A tea is described as having light, medium, or full body. Full-bodied teas have fullness and strength as opposed to being thin. A tea's body will vary according to the region in which it was grown.
- **Brassy:** An unpleasant, bitter metallic taste.
- **Bright:** Liquor looks lively as opposed to dull. This quality becomes more apparent after the addition of milk.
- **Brisk:** A vivacious, slightly astringent taste as opposed to flat or soft tasting liquor.
- **Character:** Distinct qualities of the tea that allow the taster to detect the region where the tea was grown.
- **Color:** Describes depth of color. The region when the tea was grown and the grade of tea play a part in the resulting shade and depth of the liquor color.
- **Coloury:** A liquor that possesses depth of color, sometimes indicating full body or taste, but not necessarily so.
- **Course:** An undesirable harsh, bitter taste.
- **Complex:** A multidimensional aroma or taste profile.
- **Dry:** A slightly bakey or scorched taste.
- **Dull:** A liquor that lacks a lively, bright character in both appearance and taste.
- **Fine:** Tea of exceptional taste and quality.
- **Flat:** Lifeless liquor completely lacking in briskness. This can be the result of tea that is old or has been stored improperly.
- **Flavoursy:** Tea that has a pronounced, satisfying flavor. Pronounced flavor is more generally found in high grown teas such as Darjeeling, Nilgiri, Kerala, and Ceylon.
- **Full:** Tea possessing color, strength and body as opposed to being empty or thin.
- **Hard:** Tea that has penetrating and desirable strength, particularly used for Assam tea.

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- **Harshness:** An unpleasant degree of strength.
 - **Heavy:** Tea that possesses a thick, strong liquor with depth of color but is lacking in briskness.
 - **Hungry:** When the characteristics generally associated with the tea variety or region of origin are not present.
 - **Light/Pale:** Liquor that does not have depth of color but may be flavoury or pungent. Darjeeling tea is a good example of this.
 - **Malty:** A desirable malted barley taste often found in Assam tea.
 - **Mellow:** Tea leaves which have matured well produce a mellow tasting tea.
 - **Muscatel:** Grapey taste. This is an exceptional characteristic found in some Darjeeling tea.
 - **Point(y):** A desirable brightness and acidity often associated with Ceylon teas.
 - **Pungent:** A bright liquor that has pronounced briskness and a strong, astringent flavor. Highly desirable.
 - **Rich:** A pleasantly thick and mellow liquor.
 - **Round:** A full, smooth-tasting liquor.
 - **Stale:** Tea that has an unpleasant taste because it is old or has been stored in damp conditions.
 - **Strong:** Liquor possesses strength of body and flavor.
 - **Thick:** Tea that has good body as opposed to being “thin”. Assam tea is known for producing a thick liquor.
 - **Thin:** Tea that lacks body. This is not necessarily undesirable as certain tea growing regions, such as Darjeeling, are celebrated for their tea’s thin, flavoury liquors. However teas from Assam should never have a thin liquor.
 - **Tired:** Tea that is past its prime and consequently has a flat or stale character.
 - **Woody:** Tea that has a sawdust-like character.