

The Art of Afternoon Tea

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Educational Objectives

- Participants will learn the art of afternoon tea.
- Participants will discover classic recipes that accompany afternoon tea.
- Participants will create a time to relax and focus on the moment with friends.

One of the most popular beverages in the world, tea can warm you up in the winter and cool you off in the summer. Tea is comforting to people everywhere. There are many wonderful types of tea available, and the foods that accompany afternoon tea are equally delicious!

Afternoon tea is a tradition in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada and Australia. A mini meal to curb hunger before dinner was introduced in 1840 by Anne Marie, the seventh Duchess of Bedford of Woodburn Abbey, Bedfordshire, England. The Duchess of Bedford



would invite friends to join her around 4 p.m., at her Beloit Castle estate. Small cakes, sandwiches and sweets were served with tea.

“There are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea.”

– Henry James

Most don't know that there is a difference between high tea and low tea. High tea is served at a kitchen table and was historically a sustenance meal for laborers and farmers. It was served in the late afternoon or early evening and consisted of sandwiches, coddled eggs, scones, cakes and pies. Low tea – or afternoon tea – was served from a low table in the parlor and was more of a social gathering. The food was less substantial and did not include hot savories.

The Art of Making and Taking Tea

A proper English tea follows specific tea etiquette. Muriel Moffat dedicates her book, “Afternoon Tea: A Timeless Tradition,” to her grandmothers, her

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mother and “to those who continue to believe loving family traditions are the most valuable inheritance we can leave behind.” Ultimately, the goal of afternoon tea is to create special moments to spend time and connect with our family and friends. Afternoon tea can be that opportunity without the pressure of providing a full meal.

“If you didn’t have an English grandmother, you couldn’t possibly be expected to know the proper way of making or taking tea.”

– Muriel Moffat

Consider these etiquette tips from Moffat, but keep in mind that creating a relaxing environment for conversation with the things you have available is the real purpose of afternoon tea.

- Setting a table with fine bone china (or your favorite dishes) is a part of the full tea experience. Create a setting that is lovely and special.
- The table setting for a proper English tea consists of cups and saucers, small side plates, cream and sugar, tongs or spoons for sugar, lemon slices, honey and a honey spoon, serving tongs for food, linen napkins, and of course, the teapot.
- The teapot is placed to the right of the hostess, as they will be pouring the tea.



- Sugar is added before lemon because the acid from the lemon prevents the sugar from dissolving.
- The cup and saucer are picked up together, holding the saucer in one hand and the teacup in the other. Your index finger is placed through the handle of the teacup and balanced by placing the thumb on the top of the handle. Your middle finger rests on the bottom of the handle.
- If stirring is required, the spoon is not to make any noise on the inside of the teacup. The spoon is laid to the right of the teacup on the saucer.

How to Make a Perfect Pot of Tea

- Temper the teapot by adding hot tap water while the water is being boiled. Then pour out this water before adding the boiled water and brewing the tea in it.
- Water with no taste or distilled water makes the best tea because the flavor of the tea isn’t altered.
- Always use fresh, cold water to make tea.
- Allow black tea and green tea to brew for three to five minutes and herbal tea for five to seven minutes. Steeping tea for too long can extract bitterness from the leaves.
- Once the tea is brewed to your taste, pour your tea into the teacups. If desired, add sugar and milk to the teacup.
- A tea cozy can be placed on the teapot to ensure the tea stays hot.

If you visit a tea house, the process of afternoon tea is taken care of by a server. The menu is set because having to make decisions only takes away from relaxing. You are never hurried, and your server appears only when more tea is needed. You are left alone to enjoy your company, simply relax, and appreciate the experience.

Loose Leaf or Bagged Tea?

Tea stores like Teavana offer a nice opportunity to sample loose leaf tea and to see how beautiful full-leaf tea can be, especially those with dried flowers. Full-leaf tea is made up of whole tea leaves,



whereas tea bags are filled with cut or ground tea leaves. Full-leaf tea is usually hand-picked and sold within a year to remain fresh. Bagged tea may be on the shelf for years. Loose tea is also a higher-grade tea. Some tea houses will use loose tea and others bagged tea.

Tea Varieties

There are hundreds of tea varieties that can be served with afternoon tea. These are a few of the favorites with their country of origin.

- **Assam** is a strong full-bodied tea from India that has a ‘malty’ flavor.
- **Darjeeling** is an aromatic tea from India, with hints of almond and wildflowers.
- **Chamomile** is an herbal tea that originated from ancient Egypt and is made from the Asteraceae plant. It is known for its calming properties and for promoting good quality sleep.
- **Earl Grey** is a blend of black teas scented with oil of bergamot named after the second Earl Grey, Charles who was Prime Minister of England from 1830-1834.
- **Jasmine** tea originated from the Tang Chinese dynasty, and in southern China, is served as a welcoming gesture. It is typically made using green, black, or white tea infused with jasmine flowers to create a perfect marriage of scent and aroma.
- **Moroccan mint** tea is made with spearmint leaves and green tea. The origin of this delicious tea isn’t certain, some speculate that Phoenicians brought it to Morocco around the 12th century, whereas others claim that Berbers were responsible for its arrival.

Savories, Sweets and Scones

The foods that accompany afternoon tea contribute to the enjoyable experience. The stage is set for afternoon tea when served with a savory, sweet and scone. If a three-tier server is used, the bottom layer is savory, usually some kind of freshly prepared small sandwiches. The middle layer is a sweet, which can be a variety of homemade baked goods, and on the top tier is warm scones, typically served with clotted cream, lemon curd or preserves.



Scones

Making the perfect scone is an art and may vary by country. However, the basic ingredients are the same, and blueberries, cranberries, or chocolate chips can be added for variety. Clotted cream, fresh butter, lemon curd, or a fruit preserve are nice compliments to a warm scone.

Light Scone Recipe

Ingredients:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cold, unsalted butter, cubed
- ⅔ cup buttermilk
- 1 large egg

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
2. Combine flour, sugar, baking powder and salt. Using a pastry cutter, blend in the butter until it is the size of small peas.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk the milk, egg and vanilla until fluffy. Add to the dry ingredients and stir until combined. The mixture will be crumbly.
4. Scoop the mixture onto a lightly floured surface and press into a loose ball. Knead the dough gently for 8-10 strokes. Flatten into a 7-inch circle. Cut into 8 triangles and place on a baking sheet.



5. Place the baking sheet in the freezer for 5-10 minutes.
6. Brush the tops with milk and sprinkle with coarse sugar.
7. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until the tops of the scones are lightly browned and cooked through.
8. Remove from oven and cool.

Recipe from Margaret Miltenberger

Chilling is an important step and helps create steam while baking to give the scones some lift. It's possible to chill the scones overnight so they are ready to bake fresh in the morning, just be sure to cover them with plastic wrap while refrigerated.

Scone variations include:

Blueberry – Add one cup of fresh blueberries to the flour mixture before adding the liquids. Substitute two teaspoons of grated lemon zest for the vanilla.

Cranberry Orange - Add two teaspoons of fresh orange zest and one cup of chopped fresh cranberries (or $\frac{2}{3}$ cup dried) to the flour mixture.

Lemon Poppy Seed - Add the zest of one lemon and $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon of poppy seeds to the flour mixture.

Raisin – Add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of nutmeg or cinnamon and $\frac{2}{3}$ cup of raisins.

Sweeter Scone – add one teaspoon of vanilla and an additional tablespoon of sugar.

Ultimately, the goal of afternoon tea is to create special moments to spend time and connect with your family and friends. It can be elaborate if we choose, however, simple afternoon tea with lovely cups, a tasty treat and a place to sit, rest and talk is all that you need.



Club Activities

- Plan a simple tea party with each person bringing a different tea to sample. Bring a favorite teacup or mug and share with the group about its meaning to you.
- Plan a more elaborate tea party served from a china teapot with a savory, sweet and scone to sample. For a special touch, add fresh flowers, silver, and/or nice linen. Share the tasks by dividing up the things needed for afternoon tea.

Resources

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- The Afternoon Tea Menu, AfternoonTea.co.uk Retrieved April 4, 2023, afternoontea.co.uk/information/the-afternoon-tea-menu/

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