

Favorite Herbs for Tea

When it's time for tea, brew up a pot using plants you have grown in your very own tea garden.

*Mints, including Spearmint, Peppermint, Blue Balsam Mint, and Apple Mint
Basil- Sweet Basil as well as Baja, Cinnamon, Lime, and Lemon
Lemon Verbena, Lemon Balm, and Lemon Grass
Chamomile, Borage, Scented Geraniums, especially varieties of Rose and Lemon
Parsely, Sage, Rosemary, Thyme
*Hoary Mountain Mint, *Threadleaf Mountain Mint
*Sweet Goldenrod, *Anise Hyssop, *Bee Balm, and all its monarda relations*

The above selections all grow well in East Tennessee. An asterisk indicates they are native wildflowers. In all cases, use the leaves of the plant, either fresh or dried. Flowers may be brewed, too. Some of these herbs can be a bit too exuberant in their willingness to grow and spread. These you may grow in pots, or in isolated areas set aside just for them.

A sweet and very wise customer of mine confided in me once that her favorite tea is always changing. She goes into the garden and plucks a leaf of two of whatever herbs strike her fancy that day, and brews them all up together. The one constant is that she almost always includes a single borage leaf; she says borage helps to balance all the flavors. (To do this safely, one must know one's herbs...)

Volatile oils are more concentrated in dried herbs than in fresh, due simply to absence of water in the plant tissue. For this reason, one must use more fresh herb than dried to achieve the same strength.

When brewing tea to use as a refreshing beverage, use the following technique to produce the perfect cup. Place your herbs into the teapot, either loose or in an appropriately sized tea ball or bag. Heat water to boiling, and allow to cool slightly. Add hot water to teapot, quickly close it up tightly, and cover with a tea cozy. Allow the tea to brew no more than two minutes. Remove herbs and serve immediately. If brewing for iced tea, pour into glass jar, close and allow to cool, then refrigerate.

When brewing tea for medicinal use, one might allow the herbs to steep longer, as much as 10 minutes.

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