Wandering the Web: How About a (Virtual) Cuppa? A Highly Selective Introduction to Tea Online

Roxanne Myers Spencer
Western Kentucky University

Jack Montgomery
Western Kentucky University Libraries, jack.montgomery@wku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6820

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
Tea Is Good for You

The second most popular beverage on Earth? Yes, tea. Second only to water, tea is the most-consumed beverage on the planet. Why? From help with weight loss to stress relief (there’s a symbiotic relationship there!) to fighting free radicals to improved exercise endurance and more, the humble cuppa — elsewhere in the world the most-consumed beverage — is coming into its own in the United States.

The Blog at HuffPost Healthy Living posted “6 amazing health benefits of tea” (2013). Time magazine online touted “13 reasons tea is good for you” in their Health and Family section (2012). WebMD created a short video clip reporting on the increase in tea consumption and published online articles on the health benefits of different types of tea (2013). After viewing the WebMD material, you can even take a quiz to test your knowledge on green tea! Dr. Oz and Fox News also showcase information on the health benefits of tea.

Getting interested? Good. I’ll put the kettle on, and we’ll learn some more over a nice hot cup of tea. What kind of tea? Glad you asked! We have lots of choices — there are literally thousands of blends of tea in the world, although true tea derives from one plant, *camellia sinensis*, and a varietal, *camellia sinensis assamica*. Differences in flavor, color, and benefits derive largely from the processing after the tea leaves are picked.

The four most common types of tea in the West are black (most oxidized or fermented leaves), green (leaves are steamed), oolong (or *wu long*, fermented, then pan-fired), white (least cured or fermented), and recently gaining in popularity, pu-erh (fermented, raw, or aged tea, oxidized or fermented leaves), green (leaves are steamed), oolong (or *wu long*, fermented, then pan-fired), white (least cured or fermented), and recently gaining in popularity, pu-erh (fermented, raw, or aged tea, oxidized or fermented leaves), green (leaves are steamed), oolong (or *wu long*, fermented, then pan-fired), white (least cured or fermented). It is interesting to note that black tea, as it is popularly known in the West, is referred to as red tea in its country of origin, and indeed the origin of all teas, China.

A (Very) Few Tea Vendors (among Many): A Drop in the Vast Teapot of Online Tea Vendors

Tea grows best in high, moist elevations, and the *camellia sinensis* plant can be found all over the world. According to the Tea Association of the USA:

Much of the world’s tea is grown in mountainous areas 3,000-7,000 feet above sea level, situated between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn in mineral-rich soil. Leading tea-producing countries include Argentina, China, India, Indonesia, Kenya Malawi, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Taiwan (Tea Fact Sheet, 2013).

There are a number of small, artisanal tea gardens in the United States, but the best-known commercial U. S. tea producer is the Charleston Tea Plantation, owned by Bigelow Tea, which produces American Classic Tea.

You say you like flavored teas? Well, sit back and take a fortifying sip or two, this could take a while. Popular online tea vendor Adagio Teas boasts more than 57,166 blends, as of May 2014. How is this possible? Brilliant social media marketing: Adagio customers create and rate tea blends online, often based on popular culture fandom. For example, TV series fandom blends include highly subjective and wildly varied teas based on characters from *Sherlock*, *Dr. Who*, and the late, lamented *Firefly*, to name but a few of the popular groups of blends.

Teavana, now owned by Starbucks, is opening tea specialty stores following the phenomenally successful Starbucks coffee bar model. Originally in upscale malls or freestanding stores, with colorful walls of tea tins and heavy on the screenspace of the Upton Tea Imports Website (as of this writing). There are a number of small, artisanal tea gardens in the United States, but the best-known commercial U. S. tea producer is the Charleston Tea Plantation, owned by Bigelow Tea, which produces American Classic Tea.

On the less trendy side, don’t be put off by the crowded, narrow screenspace of the Upton Tea Imports Website (as of this writing). Compared to the more colorful imagery and photos of teas to be found on other vendor sites, Upton comes off as dowdy as Aunt Matilda’s tea...
parties for the blue-haired set. The Upton difference, however, is in the details. Every one of “the 480 loose teas and tisanes” offered is as eloquently described, carefully sourced, and thoughtfully priced as on other, flashier tea vendor Websites. Their extensive catalog is available in a simple plain white paper format or online as a PDF. Upton Tea Imports is serious about the quality of its tea sources.

Somewhere between the busyness of Upton Tea Imports and the colorful graphics of Adagio Teas or Teavana is the stately yet welcoming Harney & Sons, a family business in upstate New York that imports and blends tea for international royalty — and the rest of us — at reasonable prices. Experience Palm Court, blended for the Plaza Hotel’s elegant room of the same name, or Paris, an homage to French Breakfast Tea that adds that je ne sais quoi to your morning cuppa. A key to navigating the various tea varieties on the Harney & Sons Website (as of this writing): Click the photo of the white cup of tea nestled in tea leaves — that links to the main page for each blend. Like most online tea vendors, you can try a variety of Harney & Sons original blends in inexpensive sample packets.

Another friendly tea vendor is the English Tea Store, which carries a variety of established brands from Barry’s to Typhoo, in addition to their own blends of tea, many of which are simply delicious and are also available in variety samplers. If you like a good Earl Grey, try their Dorian Grey, Double Bergamot, or Earl Grey Cream. There is also available in variety samplers. If you like a good Earl Grey, try.

### Tea and Social Media

Beyond suggesting online sites to buy your patrons, there is a growing social media aspect of tea for the novice as well as the connoisseur. Care to debate the merits of raw versus aged pu-erh? Want recommendations on fair-trade, organically grown white tea? Confused about the caffeine content in green tea? No worries — there’s a forum — and an app — for that. Tea drinkers have always been a social bunch, that much is evident from tea’s illustrious — and common-social media Mayas — and their Dorian Grey, Double Bergamot, or Earl Grey Cream. There is also available in variety samplers. If you like a good Earl Grey, try.

Another friendly tea vendor is the English Tea Store, which carries a variety of established brands from Barry’s to Typhoo, in addition to their own blends of tea, many of which are simply delicious and are also available in variety samplers. If you like a good Earl Grey, try their Dorian Grey, Double Bergamot, or Earl Grey Cream. There is also available in variety samplers. If you like a good Earl Grey, try.

Thirsty for more information on this near-miraculous beverage? If you are planning a program about tea, there are some wonderful visuals to illustrate the impact of tea on SharePowered’s “It’s Tea Time: A Collection of Tea Infographics,” or you can add to the wildly creative tea images already posted on Pinterest or Tumblr. From tea parties (of the China teacup variety) to the politics of tea (the beverage, not the party), there have been scores of books written that detail the rise of the humble tea leaf. See below for a handful of titles that showed up repeatedly on several best-of lists.

How people came to drink tea is steeped in legend, so the history of tea picks up more or less when it became a drink fit only for royalty — or a huge cash crop. Take your pick. Now sit back, relax, and enjoy a cup of tea.

**Selected Resources about Tea**

### Social Media

Pinterest Tea Boards — [www.pinterest.com/search/boards/?q=tea](http://www.pinterest.com/search/boards/?q=tea)
RateTea — [ratetea.com](http://ratetea.com/) — includes articles, reviews, and information about tea-growing regions
Reddi — [www.reddit.com/r/tea, r/TeaExchange](http://www.reddit.com/r/tea, r/TeaExchange) — discuss and exchange, post photos of tea, teapots, tea sets, etc.
Steepster — [steepster.com](http://steepster.com) — review, exchange, and discuss all aspects of tea
TeaAdvisor — [TeaAdvisor.com](http://TeaAdvisor.com) — Discussion forums, articles
TeaChat — [www.teachat.com](http://www.teachat.com) — part of Adagio Teas, this site includes TeaMap, a tearoom directory; TeaChef, recipes using tea; TeaCritic, reviews of various teas; Tea Class (www.teaclass.com) and TeaMuse, a monthly newsletter.

### Apps


### Blogs & News

A Tea Addict’s Journal — [www.marshallh.com](http://www.marshallh.com)
Lainie Sips — [www.lainiesips.com](http://www.lainiesips.com)
MattCha’s Blog — [mattchashblog.blogspot.com](http://mattchashblog.blogspot.com)
SpontaneTea — [cazort.teatra.de](http://cazort.teatra.de)
T Ching — [www.tching.com](http://www.tching.com)

Tea Blog, Official Blog of the English Tea Store — [englishtea.us](http://www.teavana.com)

Related blogs:

**World in a Teapot** — [teatimewithaccargill.blogspot.com](http://teatimewithaccargill.blogspot.com)

Tea Guy Speaks — [www.teaguysspeaks.com](http://www.teaguysspeaks.com)
Tea for Me Please — [www.teafrommeplease.com](http://www.teafrommeplease.com)
Tea Magazine — [teamag.com](http://teamag.com)
The 39 Steeps — [39steeps.blogspot.com](http://39steeps.blogspot.com)
The Half-Dipper — [www.half-dipper.blogspot.com](http://www.half-dipper.blogspot.com)

Walker Tea Review — [walkerteareview.com](http://walkerteareview.com)
Whittard of Chelsea Blog — [www.whittard.co.uk/customer/whittard_blog](http://www.whittard.co.uk/customer/whittard_blog)

World of Tea — [www.worldoftea.org](http://www.worldoftea.org)

World Tea News — [www.worldteanews.com](http://www.worldteanews.com)

### Vendors

Vendors are a very small corner of the huge online tea world.

Adagio Teas — [www.adagio.com](http://www.adagio.com)
Arbor Teas — [www.arboriteas.com](http://www.arboriteas.com)
Art of Tea — [www.artoftea.com](http://www.artoftea.com)

Charleston Tea Plantation, American Classic Tea — [www.charlestonplantation.com](http://www.charlestonplantation.com)
Culinary Teas — [www.culinaryteas.com](http://www.culinaryteas.com)

English Tea Store — [www.englishtea.uk.com](http://www.englishtea.uk.com)
Harney & Sons — [www.harney.com](http://www.harney.com)
Marriage Frères (France; UK site) — [www.marriagefreres.com/boutique/UK/welcome.html](http://www.marriagefreres.com/boutique/UK/welcome.html)

Mighty Leaf — [www.mightyleaf.com](http://www.mightyleaf.com)
Teavana — [www.teavana.com](http://www.teavana.com)
Teavivre — [www.teavivre.com](http://www.teavivre.com)

Upton Tea Imports — [www.uptontea.com](http://www.uptontea.com)

### Books


A Decent Cup of Tea, by Malachi McCormick, Clarkson Potter, 1991.


The Book of Tea (expanded edition), by Okakura Kakuzo and Bruce Richardson, Benjamin Press, 2011.


continued on page 67
And They Were There

Reports of Meetings — ASA Annual Conference and 33rd Annual Charleston Conference

Column Editor: Sever Bordeianu (Head, Print Resources Section, University Libraries, MSC05 3020, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001; Phone: 505-277-2645; Fax: 505-277-9813) <sbordeia@unm.edu>

Anger Against the Grain / June 2014 <http://www.under-the-grain.com> 67

Organizations
American Tea Masters Association — teamasters.org/
Association of Tea Bloggers — www.teabloggers.com
Fair Trade USA, Product Certification Tea Program — fairtradeusa.org/certification/producers-tea
Tea Association of Canada/Association du Thé du Canada — www.tea.ca
Tea Association of the USA, Tea Council USA, Specialty Tea Institute — www.teausa.com
United Kingdom Tea Council — www.tea.co.uk
United States League of Tea Growers — usgrowntea.wordpress.com

References


References


And They Were There

Reports of Meetings — ASA Annual Conference and 33rd Annual Charleston Conference

Column Editor: Sever Bordeianu (Head, Print Resources Section, University Libraries, MSC05 3020, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131-0001; Phone: 505-277-2645; Fax: 505-277-9813) <sbordeia@unm.edu>