

Homemade Herbal Teas

Gardens, supermarkets, and health-food stores are filled with edible flowers, herbs, bushes, trees, even some weeds that when steeped make delicious and healthful hot brews. By Alexa Fleckenstein, M.D., and Roanne Weisman

Drinking a tea brewed from freshly gathered herbs is an easy way to get nature's healing force into your body—something we all need, whether we are healthy or fighting illness. Fresh plants help strengthen the immune system and detoxify. They are loaded with vitamins, antioxidants, essential oils, soluble fiber, minerals (including calcium), enzymes, chlorophyll, and numerous compounds to boost our health.

Herbs are plants that are valued for their medicinal, aromatic, or savory qualities. Many are tasty, too. A fresh tea made from fresh herbs captures between 50 and 90 percent of the effective ingredients of the plant. (Roots would need an alcoholic extract, so leave them out.) Much of what you can use in your tea may already be growing in your garden, and what is not there you can easily plant or purchase. Because you drink with your eyes and nose as well as your palate, you want your tea to consist of three kinds of ingredients: greens, blossoms, and herbs.

How will this tea taste? Appealing and complex—and different every time because the ingredients change with the seasons. If you already like green tea, you'll be pleased with the smooth, rich flavor of your garden tea.

Kitchen herbs for your tea—such as basil, thyme, rosemary, mint, and oregano—are a delight to grow (though you can buy them in supermarkets year-round). They thrive everywhere, even in poor soil, and need little water- >



a healthy mixture makes healthful tea

For the best results, you want your tea to consist of three kinds of ingredients:

■ HEALTHY GREENS

For a full-bodied flavor, you might try steeping a combination of dandelion leaves, watercress, parsley, and birch leaves.

■ BEAUTIFUL BLOOMS

Consider using a colorful mixture of rose petals, dandelion blossoms, pansies, and violets for good taste and appearance.

■ NOBLE FRAGRANCES

Combine chives, thyme, rosemary, marjoram, verbena, oregano, and mint with flowers such as lemon blossoms and lilac.

Herbal remedies can be administered—and enjoyed—in many ways, but when boiling water is poured over herbs, the plants' soluble organic compounds are easily broken down. The resulting fragrances are an indication of the herbs' inherent therapeutic qualities.