

TeaTalk

By Joyce A. Whitaker

Owner of the Painted Lady Tea Room

By now many of you have heard the health claims associated with drinking green tea. Recent studies have shown that drinking 20 oz. of green or other tea daily significantly reduces cancer, heart disease and diabetes by up to 60 percent. The free radicals and anti-oxidants found in brewed tea help to strengthen the immune system and purify the blood. It seems logical that this is why the industry is booming.

I know from my own experience that drinking tea has grown in popularity over the past five years. When we first opened the tea room, we had to coax our customers to try new teas. Now they order freely from our menu of 40 tea and tisane selections.

In past columns I have discussed black and oolong teas and this week green tea, which is the most widely consumed tea in the world, is featured. With modern day transportation it is now possible to enjoy *fresh* green tea just like the people of Asia. There are a number of green teas from which to choose. I will start with **Gunpowder**, which is a Chinese green tea that is carefully rolled by hand into gunpowder-like pellets. It is the finest of its kind. **Black Dragon** or Dragonwell is a famous flat-leaf tea from the Chinese village of Lung Ching. This first grade tea whose sweet scent and gentle taste beautifully demonstrate while all of China so highly reveres it. **Sencha** is a popular Japanese tea made of the finest succulent needle-shaped leaves. **Sencha Premier** is a first flush (early spring) tea, gentler and more delicate, an ideal choice for a special occasion.

To the seasoned tea connoisseur drinking fine tea paired with gourmet food is akin to a fine wine with dinner or other celebration. There are many rare green teas and the more common **green pekoe**, which is well-suited as a daily treat.

You may have noticed by now that tea is processed differently for each blend. Each tea growing region is famous for its own tea specialty. Some are grown high atop the mountains, some in the lower valleys or elsewhere. Some teas are harvested in early spring, others late spring. A white tea called **silver needle** is harvested at dawn on only two days of the year. This glamorous, rare and truly refreshing special grade tea is very popular and expensive. The world of tea is vast and there is so much to learn.

One of my favorite afternoon teas is gunpowder served with warm lemon lavender tea cake with cream and candied lemon.

(Recipes follow).

Lemon Lavender Tea Cake

First, start with a leisurely stroll in your kitchen herb garden to pick fresh lavender. (If you are so fortunate!)

2 tablespoons fresh lavender, finely chopped

2 lemons

¾ cup sugar

2 large eggs, beaten

1 stick butter, softened

¾ cup all-purpose flour

6 tablespoon milk

3 tablespoons sugar, for topping

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F. Grease and line 7-inch round cake pan or 8-inch loaf pan with parchment or wax paper. Zest the lemons and set aside. Combine the juice of one lemon with 3 tablespoons sugar in a bowl and set in a warm place until the sugar dissolves and forms a syrup with the juice.

Cream the butter and the rest of the sugar together until light and fluffy. Add the beaten eggs, a little at a time, beating well after each addition. Stir in the grated lemon zest and flour; beat again thoroughly (the longer you beat the softer the cake). Add the milk and beat again.

Pour into a prepared pan and bake for at least one hour; the cake should spring back when pressed gently in middle. When done, remove from oven immediately and prick the top of the cake with a fork. Spoon the lemon syrup you set aside over the whole cake and cool to allow the syrup to be absorbed. This moist, tangy cake is oh so delicious! Slice the cake and serve with whipped cream and a candied lemon slice. To make slices: simply boil ½ cup sugar in ¼ cup water until syrupy, add lemon slices to cover bottom of the pan, remove from heat and set aside to cool. Slices will become transparent. Drain the lemon slices on a wire rack. Twist to curl, then set aside to dry. Place the lemon on top of whipped cream on the cake slices, sprinkle with powdered sugar. Use your finest dessert plates for this elegant treat that is served in popular English tea rooms.

Note: Joyce will answer your tea questions through this column. Contact her by Email: [jwhitaker @A-TEA-ROOM.com](mailto:jwhitaker@A-TEA-ROOM.com) or stop by the Painted Lady, 327 E. Fifth Street, Marysville.