

Tea Talk

By Joyce A. Whitaker, owner of the Painted Lady Tea Room

Have you ever had a four o'clock slump when your energy runs low after a busy day? That's the time to put the kettle on for a cup of hot tea. With day's getting shorter and the sun ebbing earlier, a fresh brew can bring contentment with the very first sip. Combine the tea with sunny lemon slices and fresh baked tea cake, scones or even a slice of cinnamon toast and your body and soul will feel soothed immediately. Tea is one of those eternal creature comforts that warm the heart.

One of my rituals is to make sure I always serve tea in a pretty, feminine tea cup. I also like to change the scenery by moving from room to room as I sip my tea. I daily remind myself that tea is a way of taking care of my health and well being. I may only spend ten minutes sipping this natural drink but the benefit is immediate. Actually, wheeler dealers in some large corporations are finding that a "power tea" in the afternoon reaps great benefits when meeting with clients and staff. The real wealth of the tea table lies in its ability to enrich the everyday, gild the moment with importance and celebrate the loosening of the day's demands.

Tea can mean two friends sitting down informally with two mugs and a plate of cookies or a silver pot with guests in full dress enjoying fancy tea sandwiches with pastel frosted tea cakes. Most noticeable at afternoon tea is the instant relaxation that overcomes guests as they talk and laugh with each other. The most personal conversations can be overheard as friends share events from the past, often we hear, "my grandmother had a cup just like this" or "I used to have tea with my mom when I would stay home from school with a tummy ache." One thing is for sure, taking tea is a traditional celebration that conjures different memories in each and every one who sips the brew from a cup.

Taking pains and time becomes its own reward. The aroma that permeates from opening a canister of fresh tea, studding the lemon slice with cloves and setting it afloat in the cup, such ceremonies for guests lets you offer them what often seems in short supply these days, attention and a wish to please.

There's history in the teapot, as well as the water and leaves. The Chinese are to be thanked for the beverage and the pot. Three thousand years ago before Christ, the legendary emperor Shen Nung is said to have chanced to drink the brew of fresh boiled water and leaves blown into his pot from a nearby bush and to have told his people about the miraculous elixir that conquered sleep and cured thirst. By about A.D. 700, the first tea gardens bloomed in Japan, seeded by plants ordered from China and nearly five hundred more years before the brew took root in Europe. Tea has stood the test of time becoming an international tradition. Why not build your own traditions and memories over tea?

Note: Joyce will answer your tea questions through this column. Stop by the Painted Lady or Email her at [jwhitaker @ www.A-TEA-ROOM. Com](mailto:jwhitaker@www.A-TEA-ROOM.Com).