

Tea Talk

By Joyce A. Whitaker

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Last week I addressed black teas and explained their popularity. This week oolong tea is featured. Oolong tea is a combination of the finest of green and black tea qualities, and may be thought of as teas that are lighter than the black variety and darker than the green one. Oolong is made from whole leaves, never broken, and mostly from two countries: China and Taiwan. Oolong teas continue to dazzle, and are favored by many tea aficionados.

Jasmine is a popular oolong that is infused with the delicate scent of the night-blooming jasmine flower. I have found this tea is best when savored by itself. The bouquet is distinct and somewhat sweet so combining it with food seems to take away from the experience.

Some varieties of Jasmine such as pearl tea (young tea leaves that are curled into delicate pearls that unfurl to release a bouquet of sweet flavor), can cost nearly \$40 a pound. Other oolong tea choices are jade, pouching, wuyi and ti kuan yin. No matter which oolong you try, the flavor will be sweet with a continuum of sublime flavor and aroma.

My suggestions for an afternoon tea using oolong would be to choose one of the following “Tea Trimmings”: crystallized ginger, sparingly; honey, less than a teaspoon; paper thin lemon studded with cloves, my favorite; fresh mint, crushed and brewed with the tea; preserves, add a teaspoonful of strawberry or cherry preserves into the cup like the Russians and Hungarians do and sugar cubes, pastel crystallized sugar or vanilla sugar that has been allowed to sit for a week with one vanilla bean in a tightly sealed jar.

Although tea lovers like to try new ways to drink tea, I believe oolong is best left to its own unique flavor and bouquet. If you insist on having tea fare, be sure to keep the flavors mild such as tea sandwiches made of cream cheese and walnut on wheat bread or smoked turkey with raspberry mayonnaise on white. Also, traditional, plain scones with Devonshire cream are always acceptable.

To brew oolong: heat fresh, cold tap water to just the boiling point and pour over loose tea leaves (one teaspoon per cup and one for the pot). Let steep covered for three to five minutes. Don't let your tea “stew” in the hot water. Only make enough to be enjoyed immediately.

Note: Joyce will answer your tea questions through this column. Contact her by Email: jwhitaker@A-TEA-ROOM.com or stop by the Painted Lady, 327 E Fifth Street, Marysville, OH. 7/29/04

