

## **Second Cup of Tea**

### **A Humble Yet Incredibly Useful Plant**

The tea plant, a member of the *Camellia* genus, is known as *Camellia sinensis*. In the mid-18th century, European botanists mistakenly believed that black and green tea came from two different plants. Today, we know that this is not the case. From this useful plant we can produce not only green and black tea but also red, white, yellow, and even purple tea!

The *Camellia* genus is named after Georg Joseph Kamel (Latinized as G. J. Camellus), a renowned 17th-century botanist and pharmacist from Brno, who worked on a Jesuit mission in the Philippines. There, in Manila, he established the first Western-style pharmacy while studying local medicinal plants and practices. His research made significant contributions to the understanding of the flora and fauna of the Philippines.

Like other camellias, the tea plant boasts large, conspicuous flowers with white petals and numerous stamens. It produces three-sided capsules containing irregularly shaped seeds, roughly the size of a hazelnut. These seeds are rich in oil, which is used in some regions for cooking and cosmetics. However, this oil should not be confused with the famous "tea tree oil," which comes from a completely different plant, *Melaleuca alternifolia*.

### **Dynasty of Tea Kings**

Tea plants cultivated on plantations are regularly pruned to the size of small shrubs to allow easy hand-picking of leaves. In contrast, wild tea plants in China's Yunnan province can grow as tall as 20 meters. Some of these trees are believed to be over 2,500 years old. Due to their impressive height and age, the largest ones are called "Tea Kings."

### **Tea Cultivation Basics**

Tea plants are most commonly grown from seeds, though some cultivars can be easily propagated by cuttings. It takes at least five years before the leaves can be harvested. On a plantation, tea shrubs are typically maintained for 40 to 100 years, with up to four harvests annually.

All tea plants require acidic soil to thrive, but their temperature and humidity needs vary significantly depending on the region. In tropical areas, rainfall is crucial, and plantations are often exposed to daily rain or mist. However, if grown as a houseplant, overwatering can be fatal. Tea plants should be cared for like other camellias, with cooler winter temperatures (around 15°C / 59°F) and partial shade outdoors during the summer.

### **Advice from Master Lu Yu**

As early as the 8th century AD, a comprehensive and extensive treatise on tea, titled *Cha Jing*, was written by Chinese tea master Lu Yu. This book offers detailed insights into the cultivation, processing and preparation of tea during that era.

“Wild tea is of higher quality than tea cultivated in gardens. Purple-tinged leaves from tea trees on south-facing slopes shaded by forests are superior to purely green leaves. Sharp, upright leaves resembling bamboo shoots are better than soft, dull ones, and curled leaves are preferable to flat ones.”

In most tea-growing regions, tea is still hand-picked, with machines rarely used. Hand-picking allows for the careful selection of leaves based on a specific formula. Generally, the first harvest of the year is considered the finest, and the most premium teas are made from a high proportion of top leaves and unopened buds.

### **Where Does Your Tea Come From?**

The tea plant originates from a vast region in Southeast Asia, spanning southern China, northeastern India, northern Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam and Thailand. Within this diverse area, the species has diverged into five distinct botanical varieties, differing in appearance, size and environmental requirements.

Over centuries of cultivation, specific groups of tea plants, known as *jats*, have been selected and adapted to suit particular climatic conditions. In tropical regions, large-leaf tea plants thrive in high temperatures year-round. In contrast, tea plants from the Chinese *jat* are much more resilient. These are smaller shrubs with smaller leaves that flourish in subtropical climates. Some cultivars can even grow in temperate zones, tolerating temperatures as low as  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  ( $14^{\circ}\text{F}$ ).

### **SRI LANKA (formerly CEYLON)**

For tea lovers, Sri Lanka is synonymous with high-quality, affordable black teas with malty, floral and slightly nutty flavours. Tea is also the country's most important export commodity. Over a million people are involved in tea harvesting, processing and sales, which represents about one-twentieth of the population.

### **CHINA**

With a tea tradition that spans over a thousand years, China produces some of the finest teas in the world. The country is renowned for its remarkable diversity in tea, as nearly every village has its own unique processing style. Major tea-growing regions include Anhui, Fujia, and Yunnan.

### **GEORGIA**

Today, Georgia carries on a rich tradition of tea cultivation that dates back to the mid-19th century. The favourable cooler climate and acidic soils contribute to the production of high-quality tea with a complex flavour and aroma, characterized by minimal bitterness.

## **INDIA**

India is one of the largest tea producers in the world. Indian black teas are known for their robust, full-bodied character and high caffeine content. These teas are often used in popular blends like English Breakfast and spiced Masala Chai. Assam and Darjeeling are the country's most prominent tea-growing regions.

## **IRAN**

Thanks to trade with China and India, tea reached Iran as early as the 15th century; however, local production didn't fully develop until the 20th century. Today, tea plants are cultivated exclusively in the Caspian provinces, on steep hills above rice valleys, and without the use of pesticides.

## **JAPAN**

In Japan, tea is more than just a beverage; it's a cultural phenomenon deeply embedded in society. With a rich history dating back to the 9th century, tea plays a significant role in everything from traditional tea ceremonies to modern tea bars.

## **SOUTH KOREA**

Tea has a rich tradition in Korea, although its world-class quality has only gained recognition in recent years, now rivalling that of Japanese tea. The primary tea-growing regions are located in the south of the country.

## **NEPAL**

In the impoverished Himalayan country that is the birthplace of Buddha, tea cultivation began around 1873. Today, Nepal produces exceptional black teas that rival the quality of those from neighbouring Darjeeling.

## **TAIWAN**

Taiwan is renowned for its luxurious semi-green teas, which regularly win various tea competitions. The cultivation is concentrated in the central part of the island.

## **NEW ZEALAND**

Zealong, located in the Waikato region, is New Zealand's first commercial tea garden, established in 1996 by tea enthusiast Vincent Chen. He was intrigued by the similarity between the local flowering Camellia shrub and the tea plant.

## **KENYA**

The first tea shrubs were planted by white settlers in 1903, and commercial production commenced two decades later. Due to the stable conditions in Kenya's mountains, tea leaves can be harvested year-round. Today, Kenya ranks among the largest tea producers in the world, alongside Malawi and Rwanda.

## **COLOMBIA**

Unique, high-quality tea is grown in the rich, deep volcanic soil of the Andes Mountains. The high-altitude environment and distinct microclimate create ideal conditions for tea growth. The tea cultivars in this region were introduced from Sri Lanka and Cambodia.

## **VIETNAM**

Tea cultivation in Vietnam has a tradition over 2,000 years old, with the oldest tea trees found in the northeastern hills. Premium green teas have long been produced in these traditional tea-growing regions and are rightfully considered the best in the country.

## **TURKEY**

Tea production is concentrated in the Rize region, from which the most popular Turkish tea derives its name. Despite the relatively recent history of tea cultivation in Turkey, the country has quickly become one of the highest consumers of tea worldwide.

## **MYANMAR (formerly BURMA)**

Tea is undoubtedly Myanmar's most important beverage, renowned for its exceptional quality and diversity. The earliest references to tea cultivation date back to the 8th century, and some tea plants in remote areas are believed to be nearly 3,000 years old.

## **INDONESIA**

Tea is grown in 11 provinces across the islands of Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan and Sulawesi. The first tea seeds were introduced to Indonesia by the Dutch in 1698, brought from Japan and China. Today, tea remains one of the most popular local beverages.

## **SCOTLAND**

The high altitude, clean mountain air, and fresh spring water make Scotland a unique location for successful tea cultivation. Since 2011, tea has been thriving in the Scottish Highlands.

### **AZORES**

The Chá Gorreana tea plantation and factory have been in operation since 1883, making tea one of São Miguel's leading exports. Each year, 33 tons of tea are hand-harvested.

### **SWITZERLAND**

Above the Swiss town of Locarno, a unique subtropical microclimate prevails, where tea thrives unexpectedly. The plantation was established in 2005, with the first harvest occurring ten years later.

### **THAILAND**

Tea cultivation in Thailand began just a few decades ago, primarily as part of the government's efforts to eradicate opium production and provide locals with a new source of income. The tea cultivars introduced to Thailand mostly originated from Taiwan.