

Time for Tea: Garden Drinks You Can Grow!

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General guidelines for herbal beverages

- Generally, use 1 tsp. dried or 2 tsp. fresh herb per cup of water
- Use small handful herbs per quart of water; large handful (1-2 c. fresh) per half-gallon
- Cold water rinse herbs that may be a little dirty – especially after heavy rain, dirt may splash onto leaves
- Fresh herbs benefit from slight maceration to release oils: bruise with a wooden spoon or “slap”
- Steep 5 mins with hot water or put in covered glass container in sunny area for 4-6 hours, strain & refrigerate
- Try a cold infusion or a lunar infusion!
- Strain with sprouting screen, cheesecloth, use a very loose tea bag, or just pour off the liquid
- Optional sweetening with sugar, honey, or stevia (*Stevia rebaudiana*)

Drying and storing your herbs

- Pick whole stems mid-morning after dew dries but before the heat of the day; flavor best just as plants come into flower
- Dry flat on a screen or bundle and hang in a warm, ventilated place out of the sun
- Watch out for dust or use a paper bag
- Very low oven or dehydrator (100 degrees F or less)
- Should crumble when dry; label and store in airtight container in a cool dark place

Infusible Plants from Around the World

Camellia sinensis - tea (shrub)

- grows in temperate climates zone 6 or warmer. Well-drained soil, part sun.
- harvest only newly growing leaves and buds. Oxidation to various degrees prior to drying produces tea that is green, oolong, or black.

Panax quinquefolius – American ginseng (perennial)

- 5000 years of documented use in China: currently promoted as an “adaptogen”
- Wisconsin’s most famous crop worldwide?!

Salvia hispanica – chia (annual)

- chia seed known to the Aztecs and Mayans; rich in omega-3 fatty acids

➤ **Agua de Chia**

Put **1 Tbsp chia seed** in 1 qt water and let sit one hour til seeds swell. Add **lime juice and sugar** to taste, stir and pour over ice.

Keep It Cool

Agastache foeniculum - anise hyssop (perennial)

- use leaves and flowers, has a clean licorice/minty flavor
- long-blooming lavender flowers June - September, bright green foliage, drought & shade tolerant
- bee magnet and can re-seed (‘Golden Jubilee’ and ‘Blue Fortune’); ‘Black Adder’ is sterile

Tagetes lucida - Mexican mint marigold (annual)

- use leaves and flowers, anise flavor
- cute and long blooming garden plant with yellow flowers, repels pests

Mentha spp. - mints (perennial)

- *Mentha spicata* = spearmint; *Mentha x piperita* = peppermint
- chocolate, pineapple, orange, apple, ginger
- prefer moist soil
- can spread aggressively; grow in a 12-18” steel ring or container grow

➤ **Licorice Mint Cooler**

handful herb leaves: anise hyssop + mint + stevia (optional)

Rinse leaves and toss into glass container; bruise with wooden spoon handle

Add 1 -2 qts water boiling water and steep 5 minutes; or add room temp water and steep in the sun 4-6 hours

Strain and refrigerate or put on ice

Fruity/Lemony Herbs

Melissa officinalis – lemon balm (perennial)

- easy to grow; vigorous and self-seeding

- leaves are best used when plant is flowering
- best used fresh – can develop a “haylike” smell when dried

Aloysia triphylla – lemon verbena (tender perennial)

- most lemony; can grow into a small tree, overwinter indoors

Monarda citriodora – lemon beebalm, *Monarda didyma* – scarlet beebalm (perennial)

- use leaves and flowers; citrusy with a bit of herbal warmth
- source of thymol antiseptic in many mouthwashes
- perennial for moist soils, beautiful flowers, hummingbird attractant

Salvia elegans – pineapple sage; ‘Golden Delicious’ is a nice cultivar (tender perennial)

- fruity flavored leaves and flowers; showy scarlet flowers in fall

Cymbopogon citratus – lemongrass (tender perennial)

- tropical grass with lemony flavored leaves and stem
- can use leaves but the tender white interior part of stems is most prized

Zingiber officinale – ginger (tender perennial)

- tropical plant with spicy rhizome
- peel with the edge of a sharp spoon, then grate or slice

➤ **Lemongrass Ginger Zinger**

2 - 6” pieces of lemongrass, 4” piece of ginger

Split each piece of lemongrass the long way and crush with the blunt end of a knife

Peel the ginger, chop roughly, and crush. For more gingery flavor, try grating the ginger with a cheese grater!

In a small saucepot, bring 1-2 qts water to a boil and add the ginger and lemongrass

Simmer for 15 minutes and strain, then drink hot or cold

Back to the Earth

Ocimum basilicum – basil (annual)

- savory/spicy flavors: sweet basil, chocolate, Thai, purple, lemon
- direct sow after frost danger; sow one or two more crops through early summer
- harvest leaves frequently and cut back emerging flowers to prolong the plants
- extra leaves can be frozen whole drizzled with a little olive oil in a zipper bag

➤ **Sparkling Thai Basil Lemonade**

1. Make the **Thai basil simple syrup**: mix 1 c. water and 1 c. sugar in a small saucepan, then heat on medium until just boiling and sugar is dissolved. Add a generous handful fresh basil leaves, stir in, remove from heat and allow to fall to room temp. Strain and discard solids.

2. Juice the **lemons**: need 1 ¼ c. lemon juice

3. Mix together the basil syrup and the lemon juice. Serve in a tall glass ½ full of ice: add enough basil lemonade to cover the ice, top off with sparkling water and garnish with a fresh basil leaf.

Foeniculum vulgare – fennel (reseeding annual)

- use leaves, flowers, seeds (seeds and flowers make a tasty outdoor snack)
- licorice with a hint of dill flavor, sweet or savory
- billowy purple and green foliage

➤ **Atole de Grano Fresh Corn and Fennel Top Soup**

3 c tightly packed fennel tops- feathery part only

1 t cornstarch

6 ears fresh corn

2 t kosher salt

3 limes, cut into wedges

2 Tbsp chile powder

Add the fennel tops to 2 qts water in a large pot. Cover and boil 20 min; turn off and steep for 1 hour. Remove cooked fennel, pressing to remove all the juice. Discard.

Make a paste with cornstarch and a few Tbsp hot fennel liquid. Pour into fennel broth. Reheat liquid. Shuck corn and remove all silk. Cut 3 of the ears into pieces and put into boiling liquid. Scrape kernels off the other 3 ears and add to the water. Add salt and boil until the corn is well cooked (20 minutes), removing any scum that forms on the surface.

To serve, add a few pieces of corn plus kernels & liquid to each bowl. Serve w/ lime wedges & a tiny dish chile powder.

Calendula officinalis – potmarigold (annual)

- use flowers

- good for skin

Thymus spp. – thymes

Floral Flavors

Lavandula angustifolia, *Lavandula x intermedia* – lavender (perennial)

- use buds just as opening or leaves (buds are more strongly flavored); use sparingly
- good cvs. for Wisconsin: ‘Munstead’ (18” tall, violet flowers), ‘Hidcote’ (24”, purple blue flowers),
- ‘Phenomenal’ supposed to have excellent hardiness
- grow with sharp drainage and do not cut back til late spring

Rosa spp. – roses (perennial shrubs)

- flowers: use flowers that have just opened, do not overheat
- hips: use when they are firm (not shriveled) and bright colored in fall, can be dried; high in Vitamin C
- rugosa roses work well - hips are large and plentiful; steep 4-8 hips with boiling water for 10-15 mins

Matricaria recutita (annual) and *Chamaemelum nobile* (perennial) - chamomile

- use flowers fresh or dried; active part is the yellow center
- calming and promotes healthy digestion
- can also use the common (weed) pineapple chamomile, *Matricaria dioscoidea*

Sambucus nigra, *Sambucus canadensis* – elderberry (hardy shrub)

- use flowers and berries; careful using berries of *S. canadensis*

➤ **Elderflower Cordial**

2 c. water, 2 c. sugar

15 clusters elderflowers; 1 lemon and 1 orange, sliced thin

Boil the water and sugar til dissolved and allow to cool. Cut elderflowers while cooling, shake gently to dislodge bugs. Separate flowers from stems using a scissors. Put flowers and citrus slices in a jar and pour syrup over the top; let stand 24 hours before straining and storing in a sterilized jar. Keep in the fridge for up to a month or freeze.

Tilia spp. – basswood or “lime” (tree)

- use flowers, leaves also edible
- very sweetly fragrant and a good nectar source for pollinators

Party Tricks

- **Herbal simple syrups:** add equal parts water and sugar; simmer on the stove in a small saucepan.
 - Leaves/flowers: bruise slightly and add after the sugar has dissolved; push under the liquid, let it come to a brief simmer, then remove from heat. Steep until it comes to room temp, filter, and store in fridge.
 - Roots/dried fruits: add to simmering liquid and continue to simmer for 5 to 20 minutes before cooling/straining
 - When straining, press steeped material hard against the screen to harvest the most concentrated juices

Pineapple sage/bee balm syrup: 1/3 c. fresh pineapple sage leaves + 2/3 c. fresh monarda flowers

Lavender/rose/coconut geranium syrup: 6 spikes lavender flowers + 2/3 c. rose petals + a few coconut geranium leaves (or a few flakes of dried coconut)

➤ **“Make your own” summer cocktail station:**

A little prep work lets guests make garden flavored drinks to taste.

For the drinks: Herbal simple syrups

For garnish: Sliced citrus, ginger, or cucumber

Sparkling water

Mint leaves, rose petals

Vodka and/or sparkling wine

Angelica straws, sugarcane spears, lemongrass stirrers

Fill glasses half full of ice and add 1 Tbsp. desired herbal syrup. Top off the glass with sparkling water (vodka optional) or sparkling wine. Garnish as desired for a fun summery drink!

- **Cold season cocktail variation:** try earthy syrups (cranberry/pomegranate, lemon/honey/thyme, rosemary) mixed with apple cider and bourbon. Garnish with citrus slices, halved cranberries & cinnamon sticks!

Pelargonium spp. – scented geraniums (tender perennial)

- scented leaves: lemon, lime, rose, nutmeg, apple, coconut, chocolate mint and peppermint
- flavored sugar: cover a layer of leaves with a scoop or two of sugar in a jar, repeat til the jar is full. Close the jar and let it sit on a sunny windowsill for a few weeks and then remove the leaves.

➤ **Shiso Iced Tea**

Put **2 c. fresh shiso** (*Perilla frutescens*) leaves in a jar and pour over 1 qt. boiling water; steep 10-15 minutes. Strain out the leaves, add a bit more water (2 c.) and **2 Tbsp. honey**. Chill in the fridge. Right before serving (and in the presence of your guests!), add a few Tbsp. **lemon juice** and enjoy the show!

Sources: Richter's (Ontario) www.richters.com

Hsu's Root to Health (Wausau) www.hsuginseng.com

Well-Sweep Herb Farm (New Jersey) www.wellsweep.com

Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds (Missouri) www.rareseeds.com

Olbrich Botanical Gardens Plant Sale with the Pros May 10 and 11, 2019



Moldavian dragonhead



Beebalm 'Colrain Red'



Pineapple sage (lime green) with chia
(blue and white flowered forms)



Pineapple sage in flower (red)



Two-year old ginseng seedling