

CHOOSING A TEA

By: Peter Barker, Distinctly Tea Inc.

Choosing your tea in one of our stores can be overwhelming and almost intimidating to the novice and first time visitors to our loose leaf tea store. We have had customers 'FREEZE' at the door when they surveyed the 350 selections we offer. No need to feel that way, we are here to help and offer you trained, professional & knowledgeable assistance. We have six trained Tea Sommeliers on staff at our 3 locations ready to help you with your selection. Below are some helpful hints to make you feel at ease.



1) Determine whether you wish teas with caffeine, decaffeinated or totally without caffeine.

Caffeine

Approximately 100 herbs world-wide contain caffeine. Tea (real tea as tea lovers like to refer to it) is a herb. Real tea from *Camellia sinensis* contains approximately 1/3 of the caffeine of a cup of coffee. The caffeine will stimulate your brain, just like coffee, but for most people without irritating side effects of coffee. Don't be fooled by people who tell you caffeine level varies between white, green, black or oolong. It does not. Caffeine is nature's insect repellent, so depending on growing conditions caffeine level will vary. Some other popular herbs with caffeine that we carry are: Yerba Mate, Chocolate & Guarana

Decaffeinated

Decaffeinated teas contain approximately 6% of the caffeine level of regular tea. While this is the only alternative for those wishing a 'real cup of tea' it cannot compare to regular tea.

Without Caffeine

There are many choices in both single herbs and herbal blends that have absolutely no caffeine. The most popular single herbs are Rooibos, Chamomile, Peppermint & Spearmint. In addition to these there are numerous herbal blends without any caffeine blended for both taste and purpose.

2) Determining your individual tea selections

Once you decide the caffeine part of the equation you are off to the section of your choice. If your choice is herbal, then check out the individual herbs and blends and make your selection depending on your reason for buying, taste, health, or maybe because you want to add some herbs to your diet. If your choice is 'real tea' decaffeinated that narrows your choices considerably. Decaffeinated teas are more expensive and choices are much more limited. Most main stream tea shops do not carry decaffs. When you buy at a store other than Distinctly Tea make certain you ask how the tea was decaffeinated. You DO NOT want any decaffs that have been processed using chemicals. You want the water or CO2 decaff process only. The above choices are the easiest to make. Now on to choosing a 'real tea'.

Choosing 'real tea'

'Real tea' from *Camellia sinensis* may be divided into 5 categories, White, Green, Oolong, Black & Pu-erh. NOTE! All teas regardless of category come from the same plant, only the processing is different. Tea like wine is influenced by the soil conditions, elevation, temperature, time of picking to mention a few. It is not our intention to give an exposition on all of the various tea tastes. This would take a large book to accomplish. Here we will only give a selection guide. Your nose and your palette are what matters with selection. Always buy small quantities at first until you are sure you enjoy the tea. We will not consider flavoured teas here as this is very subjective & very much a personal choice based more on flavor than on tea.

White

Very delicate flavours in most cases especially with the early pickings that are very mellow and slightly astringent. As the season progresses the leaf grows much faster, takes on a brown colour and yields a cup that looks like a weak black tea and gives one excellent cup & a reasonable second. The early spring pickings in contrast will yield 5 or more quality cups.

Green

Green tea (usually not oxidized) may be divided into Japanese (grassy in taste) and others, mostly Chinese that vary widely in their appearance and taste. Tastes here may be anywhere from mild and astringent to strong and smoky. We advise you speak to one of our Tea Sommeliers to help with your choice.

Oolong

There are two main divisions, lightly oxidized at 12–26% and approximately 70% oxidized. The lightly oxidized will vary from vegative in taste to very floral & yield five plus infusions of a yellow liquid. The heavily oxidized will yield one excellent cup and a very good second cup of a light brown liquid.

Black

Black tea (always oxidized) yields a darker stronger cup and goes well with milk and sugar if you desire. Tastes vary from mild astringent to full bodied and malty. You will get one excellent cup and a decent second cup from most black teas. We advise you speak to one of our Tea Sommeliers to help with your choice.

Pu-erh

This earthy tasting tea is reminiscent of a clean barnyard. (Yes really, this is the taste that professional tea tasters apply to this tea). Pu-erh comes raw or dark and may be aged 2 to 50 years. Like wine it gets better with ages. The raw is like a very strong green tea while the dark is like a very strong black tea. Both yield many infusions, at least five. The taste is more of an acquired taste than the other teas but is worthwhile drinking. It contains less caffeine than the others because of it is fermented rather than oxidized. A great tea for those who like tea to stand a spoon upright. Besides it will help you with digestion after a heavy meal.



When
Making
Green tea,
Never use
Boiling
water