

## Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

# Tea for two ... or three, four, or more!

By Cynthia Brian

*“There are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea.” – Henry James*



*The elegant musky scent of the hot pink Gertrude Jekyll climbing rose adds a robust flavor to teas and is gorgeous cascading over an arbor.*

*Photos Cynthia Brian*

From the time my daughter, Heather, was 3 years old, we enjoyed a ritual of drinking tea. Of course, it all began with Teddy Bear picnics and pretend doll teas. One day it escalated to brewing “real” herbal teas from the garden until it became our signature sacred Mother/Daughter sacrament where we would solve the woes of the world, and our own challenges, over an exotic potion crafted from what we grew.

Although we had consumed tea as children in my family, the formal tradition of afternoon tea began for me when I was a teen ambassador to Holland where I lived for 18 months. Every afternoon at 4 p.m. sharp, families, shopkeepers, professionals, and everyone else would stop to have a cup of tea. Tea bags were never used. All teas were brewed from loose leaves, and mixing up various concoctions was an honored ritual. Having tea and a “sweet,” usually a homemade shortbread or perhaps a slice of cake, was the perfect remedy for the midday drags. At exactly 4:30 p.m., it was back to work, school

and obligations.

Creating your own organic tea garden is easy and incredibly rewarding. Fruits, flowers, stems, and leaves can all be used to create luscious hot or cold beverages that can relax, revitalize, energize and calm. I am a huge fan of citrus. Lemons, limes, oranges, tangerines and tangelos all add a tremendous amount of zip and zest to teas. When I have to perform for a speaking engagement, or on a TV or radio show, I always drink several cups of a delicious natural brew from my garden that includes the juice, rinds and leaves of Meyer lemons, mint, chamomile and honey. My throat and vocal chords are cleared and my nerves are calmed, allowing me to perform with confidence.

### Plant Picks

Here are my picks for planting a tea garden in sun or shade. The bonus is that these are hardy perennials that will provide endless ingredients for a plethora of sweet and savory recipes including brewing tea.

- Bee Balm (citrus/spice flavor)
- Calendula (poor man’s saffron)
- Catnip (lemony-mint flavor ... cats love to roll in this herb)
- Chamomile (apple scented)
- Coriander (the seeds of cilantro offer warmth)
- Fennel (licorice flavor)
- Lavender
- Lemon verbena (lemony flavor)
- Mint (spearmint, peppermint, pineapple mint, or chocolate mint. Keep contained, if possible, as all mints are invasive.)
- Nasturtium (reseeds itself annually)
- Rose (the fragrance of the rose will determine the flavor)
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Scented geranium and pelargonium
- Viola (light violet flavor)

### Storing

Any herb or edible plant that you enjoy can be made into tea. Harvest early in the morning to capture the essential oils. Place the cuttings in a bowl of cool water to wash off any dirt or debris. Herbs can then be used fresh or they can be hung in a cool dark place to dry. Another easy drying technique is to place cleaned herbs, leaves, and flowers on a cookie sheet to dry in the sun. Or a fun trick to dry your teas is to put the cookie sheet with your herbs on the seat of your car with the windows rolled up. Park the car in the sun and within a few hours, your herbs will be dry and your car will smell garden fresh! Double win.

When storing herbs, make sure to label and date them to avoid confusion later. You can also freeze herbs in zip seal bags or make pretty herbal ice cubes for your next celebration. Ice cubes made from rose petals, violets, and the flowers of herbs are especially intriguing.

### Brewing

There are numerous ways to brew your teas. For hot teas, I fill a pretty teapot with the various ingredients that I think are needed for that day. Add boiling water to the concoction, allowing it to steep for 15 to 20 minutes. In the summer months, I muddle fruits in season – apricots, cherries, plums, peaches, grapes and strawberries. Using a strainer, I pour the tea into my favorite cups. (Tea drinking is a celebratory act and it is more festive to serve your teas in a cup that is appealing.) Another easy way is to use a press pot, called a French press, which I also use for my morning java. ... continued on next page