

By Robin Scandura

Tea Parties: A New

Twist
on an Old Favorite

SPORTING events. Barbeques. Fiestas. What do they all have in common? Tea. Yes, you can now serve tea for these occasions. Think sipping tea is just for the girls' get-togethers? Think again.

Tea with a twist: Entertaining and Cooking with Tea is the modern guide to party planning involving everything tea and tea-paired. Written by Certified Tea Specialist, Lisa Boalt Richardson, this book "...inspires the party planner in us all..." writes one book reviewer on www.barnesandnoble.com. "...this certainly isn't your grandma's doily laden book!"

A graduate from the Specialty Tea Institute, Richardson teaches, writes, and speaks all about tea. There are five basic types of tea throughout the world and thousands of varieties within those five; white tea, black tea, green tea, oolong tea, just to name a few. A type of tea can vary in different geographic locations. For example, black tea in India is different than black tea in China. The soil, neighboring crops, region, and processing technique all play a factor into how the tea tastes.

Much like wine enthusiasts enjoy wine tastings, tea enthusiasts enjoy tea tastings, also known as "cupping." A self-described "enthusiastic" person, Richardson enjoyed her first cup of loose leaf tea while in her mid-twenties in South Florida. "I love specialty tea! It is an affordable luxury that I can treat myself to every day and so can you," stated Richardson. She has been in the tea industry, loose leaf tea to be more specific, for fifteen years where she writes, teaches, and consults with tea servers, specialty food shops and culinary stores. It is a global industry, with wholesalers in the United States and importers.

Why choose tea?

Tea is the second most popular beverage in the world. Avid tea drinkers say it tastes good and is good for you. It actually has less caffeine in it per cup than coffee. Tea has another property in it than just caffeine. According to Richardson, the other property is called Theanine. Studies have shown Theanine keeps one alert while also having a soothing and relaxing effect on the drinker. It can raise serotonin levels in the brain.

Tea with a twist: Entertaining and Cooking with Tea is both informative and fun. "Tea with a Twist blows the lid off of entertaining," commented one book reviewer on www.amazon.com. Richardson informs the reader on the basics of preparing hot and iced tea. She also introduces fun tea party themes, such as Flower Power, Bubble, Tropical Tea by the Sea, Mexican Fiesta, and Southern Tailgate, All About Chocolate, and Indian Chai High and Under-the-Table tea parties.

The Mexican Fiesta Tea is a sangria style tea punch that compliments a steak fajita salad. Just subtract the wine and add the tea! Indian Chai High Tea is simply homemade masala chai. Masala chai is the Indian name for Chai tea. In India, Chai means tea. This tea is sipped best when dined on an array of Indian-inspired delights. "I want to share with tea lovers and would-be tea lovers, that entertaining with tea is easy and not just for girls," stated Richardson with excitement.

Food/Tea pairings

Much like wine, tea can be paired with both chocolate and cheese (both cream and blue cheese). Black tea is best served with beef dishes. Asian meals pair well with Asian tea. It is all about a balance much like wine pairings.

Cooking with tea

According to Richardson, one can grind up the tea leaves to use as a rub for food such as salmon. It can also be used as a sauce for some dishes by steeping the tea two times the strength one would normally steep it for.

Two autumn inspired tea/food recipes are Indian Chai High Tea served with Tandoori Chicken Thighs and the Tailgate Tea theme party. See recipes in box to the right.

These are just suggestions to bring out the modern tea drinker in you. As Richardson put it, "Your mouth decides what really goes well."

Autumn Recipes

Smokey Tea First Down Barbeque

(from Southern Tailgate Tea Party)



- 1 boneless beef chuck roast (3 lbs)
- 1 medium onion chopped
- 1/2 cup celery
- 1 t salt
- 14 t Lapsang Souchong tea divided*
- 1 1/2 cups ketchup
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1/4 cup vinegar
- 1 T dry mustard
- 2 t salt
- 1/2 t chili powder
- 1 t paprika
- 1/2 t garlic powder
- Prepared coleslaw

Steep 10 teaspoons tea in 6-7 cups of water for 4 minutes. Place beef roast, chopped onion, and celery in a large pot. Cover with tea. Bring to boil then reduce heat. Cover and simmer for 2 1/2 to 3 hours or until meat is tender. Remove from liquid and strain, saving vegetables. Allow to cool, and then shred beef.

Sauce

Steep remaining 4 teaspoons of tea in 2 cups boiling water for 4 minutes. Combine one cup tea, ketchup, brown sugar, vinegar, mashed and strained vegetables from beef, and rest of seasonings in a large saucepan. Cover and simmer for about 1 hour, stirring occasionally. If mixture becomes too thick, add remaining tea. Add shredded beef to sauce and stir until combined. May be served with or without buns. To be really southern, top with coleslaw!

Tandoori Roasted Chicken Thighs

(from Indian Chai High Tea)

If you have some stone roasting pans, use them. They hold the heat similar to a tandoori oven.



- 4 lbs boneless skinless chicken thighs
- 2 1/2 cups plain yogurt
- 1 medium onion chopped
- 6 garlic cloves
- 2 T fresh minced ginger
- 2 T masala chai tea finely ground*
- 1 t cumin
- 1 1/2 t turmeric
- 2 t cayenne pepper
- 1 t paprika
- 2 t salt
- 1 medium onion thinly sliced and chopped cilantro to garnish

Mix the yogurt and the rest of the ingredients together well in a large bowl. Cut several slits in each piece of chicken with a sharp knife. Add the chicken thighs to the yogurt mixture and coat well. Cover and marinate at least 8 hours or better yet overnight.

Heat oven to 500 degrees Fahrenheit. Place chicken in roasting pans (you will probably need 2) and cook for 15 minutes. You may grill the chicken as well for about 7 minutes on each side or until juices run clear. Place chicken on large platter and sprinkle chopped cilantro and onions over the top. Serve with a prepared jarred chutney.