

Extension Column – Use Immediately
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Brewing Flavorful Tea

Sipping on a cup of tea can be a comforting (and healthy!) practice. Tea, both black and green, contains antioxidants that may, among other things, help protect against cancer and heart disease. For a flavorful cup of tea, try these helpful tips.

Use fresh cold water rather than hot tap water or water that has already been heated for making tea. Hot tap water and reheated water have less oxygen and give a "flatter" flavor. Let the water run from the tap for a few seconds to incorporate more oxygen. Unless the directions for the tea state otherwise, heat about 8-ounces of water for each cup of tea. *Tip:* use bottled or filtered water if regular tap water has an unpleasant flavor.

While waiting for the water to heat, preheat the teapot or cup in which the tea bag(s) or loose tea will be steeped by filling it with hot water. It is *ok* to use hot tap water for preheating. If the heated tea water is poured into a cold teapot or cup, the water temperature may drop several degrees and decrease the flavor extraction from the tea. *Tip:* if steeping tea directly in a cup, cover the cup both while warming it with hot water and while the tea is brewing to retain the heat. The saucer is a possibility for a cover or purchase a tea mug with a lid.

As a general guideline, use about 1 tea bag or 1 teaspoon of loose tea per 8-ounce cup of tea. Check package directions. If the tea is too strong, add more hot water after the tea has brewed. If the tea is too weak, either use more tea or less water the next time the tea is made.

Follow the directions that come with the tea for the recommended brewing time and temperature. Generally, for black teas – bring the water to a rolling boil. Immediately pour the boiling water over the tea. Allow black tea to steep for 3 to 5 minutes.

For green tea, which is more delicate than black tea, use water that is about 160 to 180 degrees F or just below boiling. At this temperature, some steam will be rising from the water. This lower temperature helps protect against a bitter or astringent taste in green tea. Brew green tea for about 3 minutes, or as directed on the package. *Tip:* if heating water for green tea in a whistling tea kettle, flip back or remove the whistle section so the steam can be seen when it starts rising from the spout.

Avoid letting tea over steep – this also can make it bitter. It may be helpful to use a timer when brewing tea – the color of the tea is not necessarily an indicator of the tea's taste.

If using loose tea leaves rather than tea bags, the tea will taste best if the leaves have some room to expand. Place the tea leaves directly into a teapot and strain the brewed tea with a fine mesh strainer into the cups. Or use a basket infuser or a large tea ball in the teapot or cup. A tea ball or basket infuser should be filled no more than half full with tea so the leaves have room to expand for the best flavor.

For more information about tea contact Nebraska Extension in Buffalo County, 1400 East 34th Street, Kearney, Nebraska, or call 308-236-1235.