

## Make Your Own Home Grown Tea with Camellia Sinensis Tea Plants

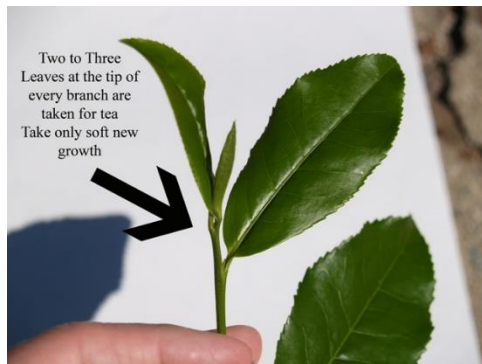
Making tea is an art, one that professional tea masters take years to perfect. But making your own tea from *Camellia sinensis* is easy! You may not be a professional tea master, and the tea you produce may not be of trade quality, but you certainly can come up with a beverage that you will enjoy and that you know is free from insecticides, chemicals and that is healthy for you and your family.

There are three main Principal methods of processing tea made from the leaves of *Camellia sinensis*.

Tea is only made from the soft new green growth from the tips of branches of *Camellia sinensis* tea plants, not from any other *Camellia*. Leaves are only harvested when the plant is large enough and old enough to support harvesting. Leaves are only taken from plants during the active growing season and never from the older, harder leaves. Usually this is from spring to late summer or early fall.

### TEA PLANTS

Start with established plants that are well branched. 3-4 year old plants are ideal. Your plants should be 24-30" tall with multiple branches.



### GREEN TEA

*Green tea is made from Camellia sinensis. Steamed and dried leaves. Fresh leaves are picked from the new growth of Camellia sinensis. They are then bruised and allowed to wilt in the sunlight or in warm air. They are then rolled, twisted and bruised. Firing or heating the leaves at this point results in Green Tea.*

Tender young growth is picked by hand from *Camellia sinensis*. Young shoots with 2 - 3 leaves are recommended. Any surface water on the leaves and shoots is allowed to dry in the shade for up to a few hours.

In preparing green tea, the oxidizing enzymes are killed by steaming the freshly plucked leaf in a vegetable steamer on your stove for less than one minute, or by roasting in a hot pan (cast-iron skillet) for a few minutes. This process is called "sha-qing" (killing out) in Chinese.

The leaves are finally dried in an oven set at 250°F for 5-10 minutes. This step is necessary to remove any moisture in the leaf so it won't mold and it stops any fermentation.

You may add dried Jasmine, dried blackberry leaf or other fine tasting leaf teas to this tea to give it a fruity flavor.



## OOLONG TEA

*Oolong Tea is made from partially fermented Camellia sinensis leaves. This method is to allow tea to oxidize only partially so that some of the fresh flavors of green tea and some of the deeper flavors of black tea are combined. Firing at this point results in oolong tea.*

The freshly plucked shoots from *Camellia sinensis* are spread out thinly over a table on a mat or a towel. The shoots are wilted under the sun or for 30 minutes to one hour, depending on the temperature.

The leaves are then taken indoors, where they are left to wither at room temperature for a 4-5 hours. During this period the leaves are gently agitated by hand every hour. Take the leaves and roll them between your hands, crushing and bruising. This process causes the edge of the leaf to turn red, and the moisture content drops about 20%. These controlled actions cause the chemical reactions and enzymatic processes in the leaf, which in turn produce the unique aroma and colors found in oolong teas.

After withering, the leaves are then dried in an oven set at 250° Fahrenheit for 5-10 minutes. This stops the enzymatic process.



## BLACK TEA

*Black Tea is made from Camellia sinensis leaves that have been fermented then dried. Leaves that are allowed to sit for longer periods of time after being rolled, twisted and bruised will turn black due to oxidation. Oxidation darkens the color of the leaves but also allows them to develop new flavor compounds commonly known as tannins. Firing stops the process and black tea results.*

Tender young growth is picked by hand from *Camellia sinensis*. Young shoots with 2 - 3 leaves are recommended. Any surface water on the leaves and shoots is allowed to dry on racks for 10 to 20 hours and its purpose is to bring down the internal moisture of the leaf to somewhere between 60% and 70% of the original moisture.

The leaves are bruised to allow the fermentation process to begin. Several shoots are rolled between your hands or crushed until the leaves darken and become crinkled. This process is repeated until all the leaves are bruised until they turn a bright copper penny color. This needs to be done about every hour for about 4-5 hours.



The leaves are allowed to ferment by placing thin layers of leaves on a tray in a shady location or indoors. After 2-3 days the leaves are ready for drying.

The leaves are dried in an oven set at 250° F for 5-10 minutes. This step is necessary to remove all the water in the leaves and to stop the fermentation process. It also seals in the flavor.

Now the tea is ready to use or store in an airtight container.

### **Tea Tips:**

*Remember that tea is an art, and it will take some time to perfect your own tea. Practice, make notes, take pictures and try different things. What you come up with will surprise you!*

*Only the soft new growth from plants that are actively growing will provide you with tea. Do not harvest older leaves, they will not produce tea that is drinkable. Also, make sure your plant is well branched and has a large number of leaves. Removing all of the leaves off the plant can damage or kill your plant.*

*Flowers of sinensis are not generally used for making tea, but I have heard of people drying the flowers of sinensis to use in their blends. There is nothing wrong with it and you can try it and see if it makes a difference.*