

# Time for Tea: Garden Drinks You Can Grow!

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## General guidelines for herbal beverages

- Generally, use 1 tsp. dried or 2 tsp. fresh herb per cup of water
- Use small handful herbs per quart of water; large handful (1-2 c. fresh) per half-gallon
- Cold water rinse herbs that may be a little dirty – especially after heavy rain, dirt may splash onto leaves
- Fresh herbs benefit from slight maceration to release oils: bruise with a wooden spoon or “slap”
- Steep 5 mins with hot water or put in covered glass container in sunny area for 4-6 hours, strain & refrigerate
- Try a cold infusion or a lunar infusion!
- Strain with sprouting screen, cheesecloth, use a very loose tea bag, or just pour off the liquid
- Optional sweetening with sugar, honey, or stevia (*Stevia rebaudiana*)

## Drying and storing your herbs

- Pick whole stems mid-morning after dew dries but before the heat of the day; flavor best just as plants come into flower
- Dry flat on a screen or bundle and hang in a warm, ventilated place out of the sun
- Watch out for dust or use a paper bag
- Very low oven or dehydrator (100 degrees F or less)
- Should crumble when dry; label and store in airtight container in a cool dark place

## Infusible Plants from Around the World

*Camellia sinensis* - tea (shrub)

- grows in temperate climates zone 6 or warmer. Well-drained soil, part sun.
- harvest only newly growing leaves and buds. Oxidation to various degrees prior to drying produces tea that is green, oolong, or black.

*Panax quinquefolius* – American ginseng (perennial)

- 5000 years of documented use in China: currently promoted as an “adaptogen”
- Wisconsin’s most famous crop worldwide?!

*Salvia hispanica* – chia (annual)

- chia seed known to the Aztecs and Mayans; rich in omega-3 fatty acids

### ➤ **Agua de Chia**

Put **1 Tbsp chia seed** in 1 qt water and let sit one hour til seeds swell. Add **lime juice and sugar** to taste, stir and pour over ice.

## Keep It Cool

*Agastache foeniculum* - anise hyssop (perennial)

- use leaves and flowers, has a clean licorice/minty flavor
- long-blooming lavender flowers June - September, bright green foliage, drought & shade tolerant
- bee magnet and can re-seed (‘Golden Jubilee’ and ‘Blue Fortune’); ‘Black Adder’ is sterile

*Tagetes lucida* - Mexican mint marigold (annual)

- use leaves and flowers, anise flavor
- cute and long blooming garden plant with yellow flowers, repels pests

*Mentha* spp. - mints (perennial)

- *Mentha spicata* = spearmint; *Mentha x piperita* = peppermint
- chocolate, pineapple, orange, apple, ginger
- prefer moist soil
- can spread aggressively; grow in a 12-18” steel ring or container grow

### ➤ **Licorice Mint Cooler**

**handful herb leaves: anise hyssop + mint + stevia (optional)**

Rinse leaves and toss into glass container; bruise with wooden spoon handle

Add 1 -2 qts water boiling water and steep 5 minutes; or add room temp water and steep in the sun 4-6 hours

Strain and refrigerate or put on ice

## Fruity Flavors

*Melissa officinalis* – lemon balm (perennial)

- easy to grow; vigorous and self-seeding

- leaves are best used when plant is flowering
- best used fresh – can develop a “haylike” smell when dried

*Aloysia triphylla* – lemon verbena (tender perennial)

- most lemony; can grow into a small tree, overwinter indoors

*Monarda citriodora* – lemon beebalm, *Monarda didyma* – scarlet beebalm (perennial)

- use leaves and flowers; citrusy with a bit of herbal warmth
- source of thymol antiseptic in many mouthwashes
- perennial for moist soils, beautiful flowers, hummingbird attractant

*Salvia elegans* – pineapple sage; ‘Golden Delicious’ is a nice cultivar (tender perennial)

- fruity flavored leaves and flowers; showy scarlet flowers in fall

*Cymbopogon citratus* – lemongrass (tender perennial)

- tropical grass with lemony flavored leaves and stem
- can use leaves but the tender white interior part of stems is most prized

*Zingiber officinale* – ginger (tender perennial)

- tropical plant with spicy rhizome
- peel with the edge of a sharp spoon, then grate or slice

### ➤ **Lemongrass Ginger Zinger**

**2 - 6” pieces of lemongrass, 4” piece of ginger**

Split each piece of lemongrass the long way and crush with the blunt end of a knife

Peel the ginger, chop roughly, and crush. For more gingery flavor, try grating the ginger with a cheese grater!

In a small saucepot, bring 1-2 qts water to a boil and add the ginger and lemongrass

Simmer for 15 minutes and strain, then drink hot or cold

## **Back to the Earth**

*Ocimum basilicum* – basil (annual)

- savory/spicy flavors: sweet basil, chocolate, Thai, purple, lemon
- direct sow after frost danger; sow one or two more crops through early summer
- harvest leaves frequently and cut back emerging flowers to prolong the plants
- extra leaves can be frozen whole drizzled with a little olive oil in a zipper bag

### ➤ **Sparkling Thai Basil Lemonade**

1. Make the **Thai basil simple syrup**: mix 1 c. water and 1 c. sugar in a small saucepan, then heat on medium until just boiling and sugar is dissolved. Add a generous handful fresh basil leaves, stir in, remove from heat and allow to fall to room temp. Strain and discard solids.
2. Juice the **lemons**: need 1 ¼ c. lemon juice
3. Mix together the basil syrup and the lemon juice. Serve in a tall glass ½ full of ice: add enough basil lemonade to cover the ice, top off with sparkling water and garnish with a fresh basil leaf.

*Foeniculum vulgare* – fennel (reseeding annual)

- use leaves, flowers, seeds (seeds and flowers make a tasty outdoor snack)
- licorice with a hint of dill flavor, sweet or savory
- billowy purple and green foliage

### ➤ **Atole de Grano                      Fresh Corn and Fennel Top Soup**

3 c tightly packed fennel tops- feathery part only

1 t cornstarch

6 ears fresh corn

2 t kosher salt

3 limes, cut into wedges

2 Tbsp chile powder

Add the fennel tops to 2 qts water in a large pot. Cover and boil 20 min; turn off and steep for 1 hour. Remove cooked fennel, pressing to remove all the juice. Discard.

Make a paste with cornstarch and a few Tbsp hot fennel liquid. Pour into fennel broth. Reheat liquid. Shuck corn and remove all silk. Cut 3 of the ears into pieces and put into boiling liquid. Scrape kernels off the other 3 ears and add to the water. Add salt and boil until the corn is well cooked (20 minutes), removing any scum that forms on the surface.

To serve, add a few pieces of corn plus kernels & liquid to each bowl. Serve w/ lime wedges & a tiny dish chile powder.

*Perilla frutescens* – shiso (reseeding annual)

- use leaves, green and purple forms
- complex earthy flavor: minty/basil/grassy
- used to flavor umeboshi plums

➤ **Color changing Shiso Iced Tea**

Put **2 c. fresh shiso** (*Perilla frutescens*) leaves in a jar and pour over 1 qt. boiling water; steep 10-15 minutes. Strain out the leaves, add a bit more water (2 c.) and **2 Tbsp. honey**. Chill in the fridge.

Right before serving (and in the presence of your guests!), add a few Tbsp. **lemon juice** and enjoy the show!

*Calendula officinalis* – potmarigold (annual)

- use flowers
- good for skin
- floriferous annual for all seasons, reseeds lightly
- ‘Resina’ is a high oil strain

*Thymus* spp. – thymes (perennial)

- creeping, drought tolerant perennial
- many different types: Mother of thyme, English, lemon, lime, minty, orange

➤ **Thyme for Fall Calendula Brew**

Harvest fresh : 3 sprigs ‘**Spicy Orange**’ thyme and 5 **calendula flowers**. Separate petals from calendula flowers and discard the leftover green sepals. Pour 8 oz water just off a boil over the thyme and petals and steep for four minutes; sweeten with honey if preferred.

## Floral Flavors

*Matricaria recutita* (annual) and *Chamaemelum nobile* (perennial) - chamomile

- use flowers fresh or dried; active part is the yellow center
- calming and promotes healthy digestion
- can also use the common (weed) pineapple chamomile, *Matricaria dioscoidea*

*Lavandula angustifolia*, *Lavandula x intermedia* – lavender (perennial)

- use buds just as opening or leaves (buds are more strongly flavored); use sparingly
- good cvs. for Wisconsin: ‘Munstead’ (18” tall, violet flowers), ‘Hidcote’ (24”, purple blue flowers),
- ‘Phenomenal’ supposed to have excellent hardiness
- grow with sharp drainage and do not cut back til late spring

*Rosa* spp. – roses (perennial shrubs)

- flowers: use flowers that have just opened, do not overheat
- hips: use when they are firm (not shriveled) and bright colored in fall, can be dried; high in Vitamin C
- rugosa roses work well - hips are large and plentiful; steep 4-8 hips with boiling water for 10-15 mins

*Sambucus nigra*, *Sambucus canadensis* – elderberry (hardy shrub)

- use flowers and berries; careful using berries of *S. canadensis*

➤ **Elderflower Cordial**

2 c. water, 2 c. **sugar**

15 clusters **elderflowers**; 1 **lemon** and 1 **orange**, sliced thin

Boil the water and sugar til dissolved and allow to cool. Cut elderflowers while cooling, shake gently to dislodge bugs. Separate flowers from stems using a scissors. Put flowers and citrus slices in a jar and pour syrup over the top; let stand 24 hours before straining and storing in a sterilized jar. Keep in the fridge for up to a month or freeze.

*Tilia* spp. – basswood or “lime” (tree)

- use flowers, leaves also edible
- very sweetly fragrant and a good nectar source for pollinators

➤ **Linden Honey**

Just as **linden flowers** are opening, harvest enough to fill a small glass jar. Cover completely in **honey**. Allow to steep for several days in a cool, dark place, turning gently a few times to circulate the flowers. Strain if desired and use on toast or as a lovely summery accompaniment to your favorite herbal beverages!

## Party Tricks

➤ **Herbal simple syrups:** add **equal parts water and sugar**; simmer on the stove in a small saucepan.

- Leaves/flowers: bruise slightly and add after the sugar has dissolved; push under the liquid, let it come to a brief simmer, then remove from heat. Steep until it comes to room temp, filter, and store in fridge.

- Roots/dried fruits: add to simmering liquid and continue to simmer for 5 to 20 minutes before cooling/straining
- When straining, press steeped material hard against the screen to harvest the most concentrated juices

➤ **“Make your own” summer cocktail station:**

*A little prep work lets guests make garden flavored drinks to taste.*

For the drinks: Herbal simple syrups	For garnish: Sliced citrus, ginger, or cucumber
Sparkling water	Mint leaves, rose petals
Vodka and/or sparkling wine	Angelica straws, sugarcane spears, lemongrass stirrers

Fill glasses half full of ice and add 1 Tbsp. desired herbal syrup. Top off the glass with sparkling water (vodka optional) or sparkling wine. Garnish as desired for a fun summery drink!

**Pineapple sage/bee balm syrup:** 1/3 c. fresh pineapple sage leaves + 2/3 c. fresh monarda flowers

**Lavender/rose/coconut geranium syrup:** 6 spikes lavender flowers + 2/3 c. rose petals + a few coconut geranium leaves (or a few flakes of dried coconut)

➤ **Cold season cocktail variation:**

For the drinks: Herbal simple syrups	For garnish: Sliced lemons and cranberries
Apple cider or cranberry juice	Sprigs of rosemary and thyme
Bourbon and/or vodka	Cinnamon sticks

Fill glasses half full of ice and add 1 Tbsp. desired herbal syrup. Top off the glass with cider or cranberry juice and your spirit of choice (optional). Garnish as desired for a cozy winter cocktail! Also good served warm.

**Molasses/cherry/cinnamon:** 1/4 c. molasses + 2 cinnamon sticks (crushed) + 1/2 c. tart cherries

**Lemon/honey/thyme:** 1/4 c. honey + 10 hearty sprigs thyme; after syrup is filtered, add juice of 2 lemons

*Pelargonium* spp. – scented geraniums (tender perennial)

- scented leaves: lemon, lime, rose, nutmeg, apple, coconut, chocolate mint and peppermint
- flavored sugar: cover a layer of leaves with a scoop or two of sugar in a jar, repeat til the jar is full. Close the jar and let it sit on a sunny windowsill for a few weeks and then remove the leaves.

**Sources:** Richter’s (Ontario) [www.richters.com](http://www.richters.com) Hsu’s Root to Health (Wausau) [www.hsuginseng.com](http://www.hsuginseng.com)  
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