

Tom's Garden

Blog

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It's Teatime! Author, Meghan Shinn

Tea Plants Native to North America

After the Boston Tea Party of 1773, patriots looked for alternatives to purchasing the tea brought by the British from China. Several kinds of "liberty tea" soon appeared throughout the colonies, featuring herbs such as thyme, sage, and rosemary. People also used native plants as tea plants, following the wisdom of Native Americans. Here are popular native plants that were used and deserve a space in the garden, or teapot, today:

New Jersey Tea (*Ceanothus americanus* USDA Zones 4-8)—an autumn-blooming, white flowered shrub that grows in sun or part shade and can take dry soil. A teaspoon of dried leaves will create a nicely-flavored tea.

Spicebush (*Lindera benzoin* Zones 4-9)—a beauty for partial shade, this shrub offers early spring flowers and golden fall foliage. Citrus-tinged iced tea can be made by crushing and soaking the leaves in tepid water for a few hours, then chilling and adding a sweetener.

This plant is also a host plant for the spicebush caterpillar; double duty.

Sweet fern (*Comptonia peregrina* Z 2-6) This fern tolerates poor and disturbed soils and partial shade, making it a good candidate for edging a drive or walkway. Crushing fresh fonds and soaking them in tepid water will make a nice light tea.

Anise-scented goldenrod (*Solidago odora*; zones 4-9)—also known as sweet goldenrod, this species makes a licorice-flavored tea and doesn't spread aggressively in a garden. Fresh leaves or dried flowers and leaves contribute to the tea.

Adapted from "Liberty Teas" by Akshay Ahuja, horticulture March/April 2016.

We are familiar with herbs being used for flavoring our food, but traditionally, these same herbs were used by our ancestors to treat various ailments. Here are just a few, you can do research and find many more. A lot of our prescription medicines are derived from herbs.

Thyme- Thyme is recommended for respiratory diseases. Its most notable chemical compound, thymol, is recognized for its strong antiseptic action.

Lavender- Lavender contains antioxidant properties that help reduce inflammation.

Chamomile- Chamomile is very popular for curing an upset stomach. It is also used for sleep related issues, morning sickness and skin problems. It is a very popular tea.

Lemon Balm- Lemon balm has anti-viral and relaxing properties. It can be used to treat upset stomach and is very easy to grow. Lemon balm can be a little invasive if you let the seeds spread.

Turmeric- Curcumin is the main active ingredient in turmeric. Curcumin has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties and can help relieve arthritis pain. Curcumin can also improve memory performance.

Search for "apothecary or alternative medicine" books online for much more valuable information.

July Is Garlic Month for Me

I planted the cloves in early October and now it is time to reap what I have sowed. How can you tell when to dig up your garlic? If you pick them too early or too late, they won't store well.

There is a way to tell when the garlic crop is ready. The number of green and brown leaves is a good sign.

Each leaf of a garlic plant indicates a protective paper wrapped around the bulb. A reliable harvest indicator is when half the leaves have turned brown, and half are still green. If you wait till all leaves have turned brown, the garlic won't store well.

If you grow the hardneck variety of garlic, it will form scapes about 4 to 6 weeks before the bulb is mature. Harvest the scapes and use them in the kitchen.



When half to three quarters of the leaves are dry, dig one of the bulbs up and see how it looks. If the cloves are plump and formed well, dig them up. Brush off any loose soil, but don't wash it or remove the bulb wrappers. Washed bulbs will hold onto that moisture and rot more easily.

Store the garlic at room temperature in a dark, dry place with air circulation. An open

paper bag, an onion bag, or a wire basket is ideal. Don't store garlic in the fridge. Light and moisture will degrade garlic rapidly. Let the garlic dry naturally and it will keep for several months. It's a good idea to let garlic cure for 2 weeks to a month before using, depending on the weather. The flavor will mellow and improve during this period and lose some of its heat.



A lot has been written about storing garlic for the long term, but my favorite way is to freeze it.

First, keep enough of the best cloves aside to plant in October. Peel and place the other cloves in a freezer container, and place in the freezer. I have found a Mason jar to be ideal, as a freezer bag will leak out the odor. These bulbs will never sprout again so only freeze the ones you will use in the kitchen. This way, when you need garlic, just remove a few cloves from the freezer and they will thaw in a few minutes and be ready for your recipes. They will keep indefinitely in this state. Happy Garlicking!

Containers for your Garden

Using pots in and around the garden is a good way to experiment and add color. Not only the plant, but also the pot can bring out color combinations that are very pleasing.

Perennials and immature woody plants can be planted in pots, then moved around the garden during summertime. Late summer or early fall, those plants can be put in the ground for their final resting place. Be sure to visit your local arboretum to see how large these plants get and how they will look in your landscape at maturity. Annual flowers can play a large part in giving color to otherwise drab areas where perennials have finished blooming or are not quite in season yet. Annuals grow very well in pots and can be moved around all summer long to fill in wherever a little color is needed.



This area, due to tree roots, can only be planted with pots.



Use different textures in your pots. Sedum, succulents, and leafy kale can create a dramatic effect among softer-looking foliage. Use colors such as cockscomb and amaranth to make the garden pop. Black containers with brightly colored plants in them is another way to create a visual effect. Don't forget hanging baskets. Baskets don't have to hang from your porch, they can look nice hanging from a tree branch or pergola. Be sure to place plants where they receive favorable lighting conditions.

Butterfly Weed



Asclepias tuberosa

This plant is commonly known as butterfly weed and is a species of milkweed native to eastern and southeastern North America. It got its name because many butterflies are attracted to the plant by its color and large production of nectar. It is the larval food plant of many butterflies and moths. Butterfly weed is easily grown from seed and difficult to transplant because of the long taproot. It takes about 3 years for it to reach full flowering stage from seed.