



Garden Tea by Jane Cundiff

Healthy for people. Healthy for the environment.



MAKING TEA right from the backyard with herbs and wild plants is easy. About 1 cup of lightly packed freshly picked leaves & flowers will make about one quart of tea. I like to make it concentrated. About one quart of fresh picked leaves covered with water will make about a gallon of tea which can be diluted, heated up or iced down anytime.

1. Pick or cut only, healthy, tender plants. Rinse dirty plants. Use plants without pesticides.
2. Put the fresh leaves, flowers & tender stems into boiling water removed from the heat source.
3. Mash it a bit. Steep it **overnight** or even a couple days in the fridge to get the most nutrition and flavor from the plants. Pour through a strainer into your tea jug and add water to taste as needed. If your tea is too bitter you may be using too much of that herb. Sometimes adding more water is all it needs, or adding a gentler herb. Just 2-3 sprigs fresh plant squished in a cup of water or your water bottle also makes a quick nutritious drink.

WHY DRINK GARDEN TEA?

#1 – for health! All teas contain minerals, vitamins & all sorts of nutrients. Black and green tea we buy at the store are from leaves containing caffeine grown in tropical mountains. They are good for us in the morning but used in the afternoon or evening can cause sleep problems. There are hundreds of plants that can be used to make “herbal” teas. (Identify plants carefully as some can be toxic - like parts of the Nightshade or Hemlock families.) We have all learned to “eat leafy greens” as part of a healthy daily diet and tea leaves are leafy greens with mostly the same benefits. ALL leafy greens have vitamin C, flavonoids, phytonutrients and lots more. (We still need to EAT greens for the fiber and chemicals not soluble in tea water.) ALL natural teas are nutritious and have a balance of nutrients FAR better for us than the chemical concoctions of sodas or vitamin waters sold in packages that come from factories. If we are using the wild, fresh & organically grown plants from our backyard – it doesn’t get any healthier than that! In studies of healthy centenarians, diets high in a mix of leafy greens & fresh fruit was a common factor. ALL leafy greens have some anti-inflammatory properties and help to boost our immune system and keep our joints and our brain healthy. But do keep a balance, as too many greens can cause problems too – especially for people with kidney trouble. Oh, and ditch the sweeteners. Neither sugar nor artificial sweeteners are good for us. A touch of local honey, well, OK, but it is better to get used to the pure flavors of the tea without sweetener.

#2 – for the environment! Sodas and other purchased drinks are produced in factories that destroy habitat, use earth’s precious resources to make packages and require trucks and fossil fuels to deliver the heavy liquids to stores. Just look at a case of bottled drinks and think about the trucks that have to be built, the mines that have to be dug to get the materials to make trucks, packaging, repair roads, build refrigerators and stores, etc., etc. Do the math. How many disposable drink containers will you use in a lifetime? Thousands? And recycling containers is very energy and materials intensive (requires more trucks & factories & energy). Even commercial tea bags are FAR better than liquids in containers. On the other hand – you could be using the same ceramic mug you bought 25 years ago to brew some leaves picked from the backyard!!

What grows in Floyd that we can use for tea? Here are just a few of my favorites for daily use. Read about them on the internet for their fabulous healthy qualities.

Garden plants – Mint varieties, Lemon Balm & Anise Hyssop are all perennials that will spread into a nice patch if they get plenty water. They can also grow fine with a little shade. Holy Basil (also called Tulsi) is my favorite annual tea. The leaves, stalks & flowers all are good in tea and are good for the immune system and reducing stress. Anise hyssop is good to soothe the throat and has a sweet flavor.

Wild plants – Blackberry & raspberry leaves don’t have much flavor but add nutrients to stronger flavors like mint. I like to toss a few wild flowers into the tea – like dandelion, red clover, goldenrod or yarrow (good for colds & allergies). Lambsquarters or Galinsoga adds a hearty green flavor & good nutrition.

Storage - You can collect leaves and either dry them or freeze them in a zip-lock bag to use in winter.

A few wild tea plants of the Floyd Area

(all these teas are safe - without any known toxicity)

Blackberry or raspberry leaves. The best-known flavonoids are quercetin and kaempferol which *blackberry leaves* contain. Due to their anti-inflammatory and immune boosting *benefits*, *blackberry leaves* are used to aid in healing sore throats, mouth sores, anti-aging, diarrhea, wounds and hemorrhoids. They have a mild flavor and are often used with stronger flavor teas. (Celestial Seasoning teas use them a lot) You can use all you like – 3-7 fresh leaves per cup, steeped overnight is best or at least 10 minutes. They can be used often and a lot as a healthy leafy green addition to other teas.



Goldenrod is used to treat urinary tract inflammation and to prevent or treat kidney stones. It is also used for gout, joint pain (rheumatism), arthritis, as well as allergies, eczema and other skin conditions. It is a Fall wild flower in sunny fields. They have a strong flavor and are better used with lemon balm or other leaves – less than 1/2 tsp per cup. If too bitter – add more water or include other mild teas like lemon balm.

Yarrow flowers and leaves are used for fever, common cold, hay fever, diarrhea, and intestinal gas. It is a strong bitter flavor and you don't need much for a cup of tea – less than 1 tsp. Good for colds and the immune system. It is a spring flower, dries easily and can be stored for winter tea.



Wild Cherry Bark & fruit

Wild cherry tree bark is used for colds, whooping cough, bronchitis and other lung problems; diarrhea; gout; digestive disorders; pain; and cancer. It is also used in cough syrups because of its sedative, expectorant, drying, and cough-suppressing effects. Use a potato peeler to peel the bark from fresh, young tender limbs, less than an inch in diameter. Be sure to get some of the tender

white layer just under the brown bark where there is plenty sap. Peelings can be frozen in a zip-lock bag or dried and stored in a jar.

Wild cherry fruits are very tiny but tasty and nutritionally potent. You can pop a few into your mouth & then spit out the pits – or you can gather half a jar, mash well with a spoon & cover with water overnight before straining off the healthy juice.

Autumn Olive berries – squished or pureed in a blender and soaked in water overnight makes a nutritious fruity juice by itself or added to tea or other juice. Freeze as ice cubes for high vit C winter juice.



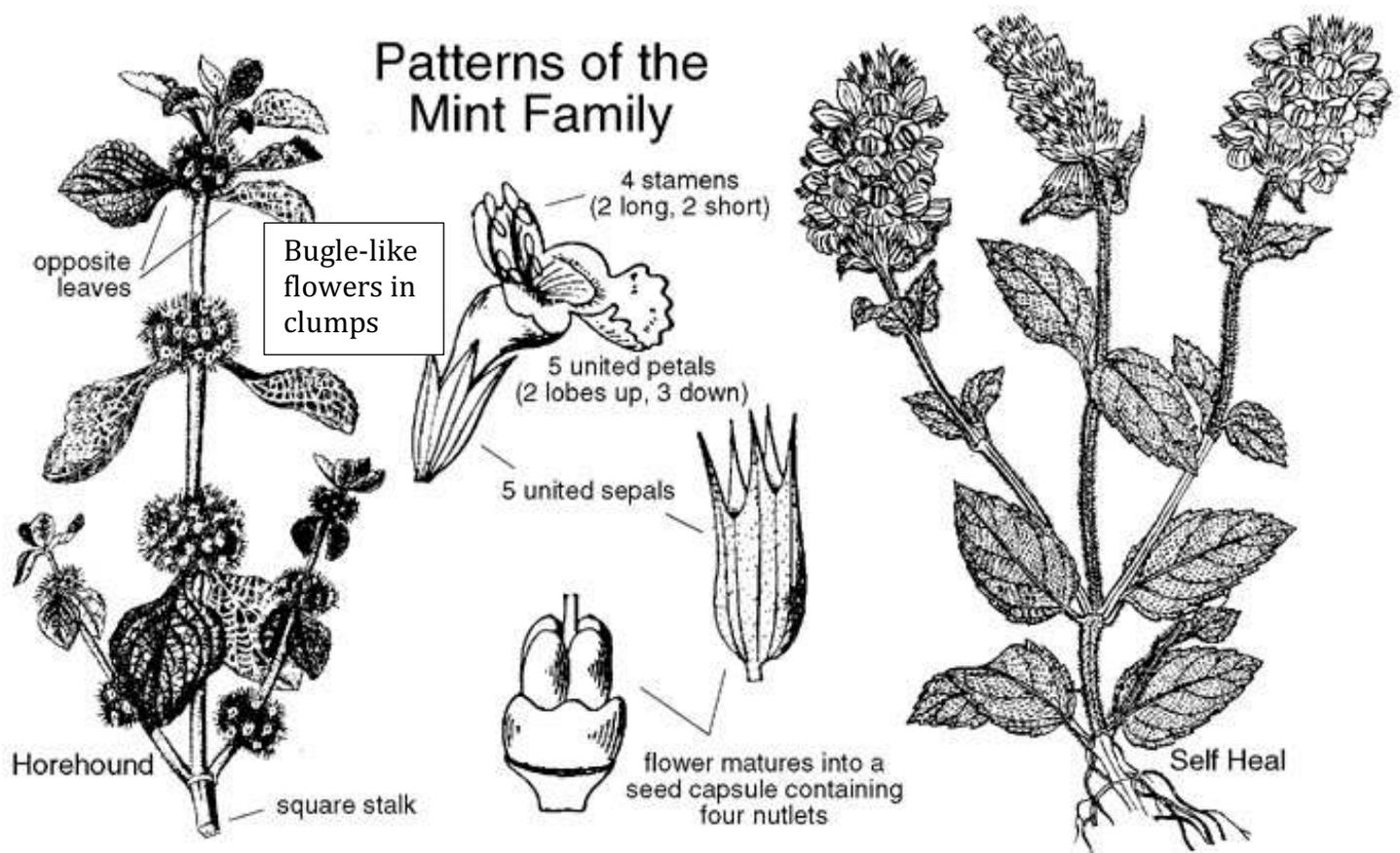
The Mint Family= My favorite

The Mint Family, Lamiaceae is quite large with around 8,000 species. If you pick a plant with a distinctly square stalk, simple, opposite leaves, a bugle-like flower then it is very likely a member of the Mint family. The flowers are usually tiny, found in clumps and look like little pitchers or bugles. Many grow quite easily in gardens if kept watered (Lemon balm, Basil and Hyssop are mint family). Pollinators love the flowers. Hummingbirds love the bigger ones – like Bee Balm.

None of the mints are toxic and ALL are healthy additions to tea. They all have vitamins and minerals, boost the immune system, are anti-inflammatory for joints, good for the brain and aid in digestion.

The aromatic quality of these plants makes them useful in cooking, and nearly half the spices in your kitchen come from this one family, including basil, rosemary, lavender, marjoram, thyme, savory, & sage.

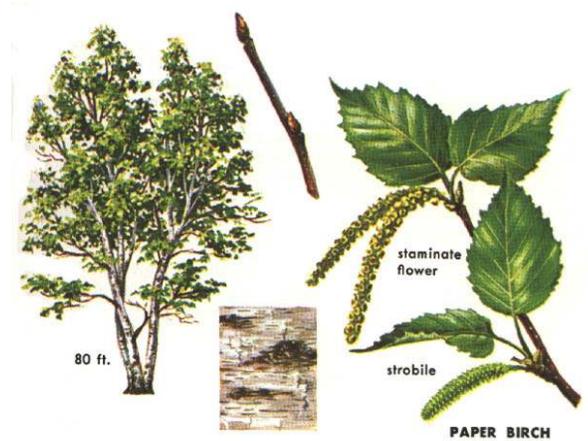
Common mint family plants used in healthful teas include the many varieties of mints, such as apple mint, chocolate mint, spearmint, pineapple mint and wild mountain mint. They also include hyssop, motherwort, bee balm, lemon balm, marjoram, skullcap, Tulsi (holy basil), self-heal and savory.



Birch Tree

Birch leaves contain lots of vitamin C, are used to make medicine. Birch is used for infections of the urinary tract that affect the kidney, bladder, ureters, and urethra. It is also used as a diuretic to increase urine output and reduce the inflammation of arthritis. Some people take birch along with lots of fluids for “irrigation therapy” to flush out the urinary tract.

Birch bark is quite tasty and is still used in a tasty soda called “birch beer”. Use the twigs or peelings from very young limbs. It is said to help to tone the body and contains anti-inflammatory, antibacterial & antiviral chemicals. Native Americans were known to use the bark tea for stomachache, diarrhea, lung ailments, and fever. About 3 tablespoons per cup steeped overnight and stored in the fridge. (It can cause constipation if overused)



Rosebud or rosehip tea

The name itself conjures up thoughts of beauty and serenity. There are lots of wild roses around, including some invasive ones. Use them all! Rosebud tea has been prescribed as part of Chinese medicine for more than 5,000 years. Benefits include easing depression, soothes the nerves, benefits circulation, reduces indigestion and as natural treatment for PMS and menstrual cramps and stabilizing emotional swings. The rose flowers can be used in the bud or full flower stage and also the fruit (**rose hip**). All are very high in vitamin C and antioxidants. All are best mashed with warm water poured over them and left for 3-8 hours to steep (this is called an infusion). Use about 1 cup fruit or flowers to 2 cups water and then dilute to taste after steeping.



Edible flowers can also be added to any tea – rose, clover, dandelion, mullein, calendula, lavender, dandelion, daylily & ALL the mint family flowers.

****ALL Edible greens can be added to teas** to tame strong flavors and add some super-nutrition of leafy greens. Wild edible greens include: chickweed, violet leaves, lambsquarters, plantain, galinsoga and pigweed. Wild mints are especially healthy in teas – like Heal-all and mountain mint. Kale & spinach are good additions.

My favorite guide book is **Peterson's Field Guide to Edible Wild Plants of Eastern and Central North America.**

I also check the internet – especially WebMD for use & toxicity info. **Never use an herb you don't know.**