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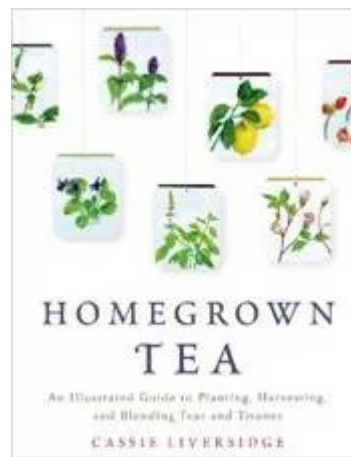
# How to Grow and Make Your Own Tea

By [Tom Oder](#) August 18, 2021



Imagine a cup of tea that started in your own garden.

If growing your own food isn't your cup of tea, Cassie Liversidge is out to change your mind. Be forewarned, though, that if you love tea, Liversidge has already won half of the mind-game battle.



Liversidge, an artist, writer, and gardener who lives in London and says that one of the best parts of her day “is sitting in bed in the morning, reading to my children and drinking a cup of black tea,” has written a book that explains how anyone can easily plant, grow and harvest a large variety of [common plants from which they can brew teas](#) and tisanes. "Homegrown Tea: An Illustrated Guide to Planting, Harvesting, and Blending Teas and Tisanes" (St. Martin's Press) is due out March 25.

“One of my main reasons for writing 'Homegrown Tea' was because I would like people to utilize and understand the plants they grow so that we can all live in a more sustainable way,” said Liversidge, who came to love plants and develop a healthy respect for sustainability at an early age when she was growing up at her parents’ plant nursery. “When you have grown your own, you naturally learn about that plant, not only how to grow it but also when it is good to harvest as well as knowing what effect consuming it has on your body.”

## Let's Start at the Beginning

Liversidge begins the book with tips on [how to brew a great cup of tea](#): why and how to use a teapot, how to properly place tea in your own tea bag (did you know tea bags were developed by accident when people receiving samples of tea in silk bags thought they were supposed to brew the tea in the bags?), why you should always boil fresh water to make tea, how long you should let the water rest before pouring it onto your tea, and what time of day to harvest tea.

Liversidge then goes into the heart of the book, the plants from which various teas can be made. She divides plants into five sections based on which parts of the plants are used to make tea: leaves, seeds, fruits, flowers and roots. In each section, she includes a variety of common plants with a description of the plant, how to grow them, how and when to harvest them and how to optimally prepare and brew tea from each plant. The best news of all for tea lovers is that you don't have to live in a house with a yard and a large garden to have your own natural tea cupboard. Many plants that can be used to make teas and tisanes can be grown in pots on a patio, an apartment balcony or even in a sunny window. Liversidge even includes a chapter with extra gardening advice.

Here is a guide to growing and harvesting a plant from each of the five sections. Be aware, Liversidge advises, that many of the homegrown teas she includes in the book will be very pale in color. But, she promises, if you try them you will be amazed at how complex in flavor they can be.

## Tea From Leaves



## **The tea plant, *Camellia sinensis***

Camellias are popular among gardeners for producing beautiful flowers during the fall and winter when little else is in bloom. One camellia species though, *Camellia sinensis*, is unusual in that it produces all of the world's commercial teas, including white, green, oolong and black teas. Two main varieties are grown and harvested for tea, *Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis* from China, and *Camellia sinensis* var. *assamica* from Assam, India.

**How to grow:** *Camellia sinensis* var. *sinensis* will thrive in a sunny to partly shaded location in USDA Zones 7-9. If growing in a pot, you may want to move it to a sheltered location to protect the roots from freezing during severe winter temperatures. You can prune it to a height of three feet or so as commercial growers do for ease of harvesting, or you can let it grow naturally into a large shrub or small tree. The small white flowers that appear in the fall can be harvested and dried and added to the leaves to enhance the flavor of the tea. Different methods of growing, harvesting or processing are used to create the different teas from this species. Here is how Liversidge makes green tea from *Camellia sinensis* var. *Sinensis*.

**How to harvest:** The secret to making green tea is to harvest the top two leaves and leaf bud on the new spring growth. The new stems will be green in contrast to the brown stems from the previous year's growth.

**How to make tea:** Heat the leaves before they have a chance to oxidize (dehydrate). To heat the leaves, steam them for 1 to 2 minutes and then immediately run cold tap water over them to stop the heating process and to retain the green color. Then roll the leaves, which will be soft and flexible, with your hands or with a sushi-rolling mat into tubes. Immediately after all the leaves are rolled, spread them in a dish and place them in an oven preheated to 212-230 degrees F for 10 to 12 minutes, turning them after five minutes to ensure even drying. The heating process is finished when the leaves are totally dry and crispy. Store them in a sealed glass container.

To brew the tea, put six leaves in a tea bag, place the bag in a cup that's been preheated with hot water, pour boiling water into the cup and cover it with a lid, and let the tea steep for three minutes.

**Bonus tip:** Dried *Camellia sinensis* flowers or dried flowers from roses or violets can be added and stored with the dried and rolled leaves to enhance the flavor of green tea.

**Other choices:** This is the largest section of plants in the book and includes 20 plants with leaves suitable for making tea. Among those are lemon balm, mint, rosemary, sage and thyme.

## Tea From Seeds



### **Cilantro/coriander, *Coriandrum sativum***

Cilantro, sometimes referred to as Chinese parsley, is an aromatic herb popular for use in Indian foods such as chutneys and salads, in Chinese and Thai dishes, in Mexican salsas and guacamoles, and as a garnish in salads. It is an annual that will grow fast in cool spring weather but will quickly “bolt” and grow flowers that turn to seeds, called coriander in the United States, when the weather warms. The short growing season is frustrating for people who harvest the leaves, but welcomed by those who want to use the seeds to make tea. The tea is best made from a combination of seeds and leaves.



**How to grow:** Cilantro can be grown from seed but starter plants are often available at nursery centers. If growing from seed, plant directly in the ground as small cilantro seedlings often do not survive the transplanting process. If growing in a pot, choose one at least 12 inches deep because cilantro has a deep tap root.

**How to harvest:** Harvest leaves a few weeks before gathering the seeds (by the time the seeds are mature, the leaves will have become feathery and will be past their prime). Place the leaves on a dish in a warm, dark place, and when thoroughly dry store them in a sealed container. Wait until the seeds start to turn brown on the plant before harvesting them; cut long stems and hang them upside down in a warm place. When totally dry, store the seeds with the leaves (harvested earlier) in the sealed container.

**How to make tea:** Grind about 15 seeds in a mortar and pestle. Put the crushed seeds and two pinches of leaves into a tea bag. Warm a cup with hot water and discard the water. Place the tea bag in the cup and fill the cup with boiling water. Cover the cup with a saucer or lid and allow the tea to steep for four minutes. Remove the tea bag and enjoy.

**Bonus tip:** Cilantro is susceptible to mildew, so remove any infected leaves immediately.

**Other choices:** Liversidge includes fennel and fenugreek as two other plants that produce seeds that can be used to make tea.

# Tea From Fruit



## **Rose hip, *Rosa rugosa***

Rose hips are the bulblike fruit that forms on roses after they have been pollinated by bees. If you want to try rose hip tea, be sure to leave the flower heads on the plants as the petals age and drop. Be aware that roses that have been bred to have tightly packed petals may not form rose hips because bees may not be able to pollinate the flower due to its dense structure.

**How to grow:** *Rosa rugosa* is an excellent choice to grow to make rose hip tea. As with all roses, select a sunny to mostly sunny location and dig a planting hole twice as big as the root ball — or select a pot twice as big as the root ball if growing your rose in a container. Roses are heavy feeders and will appreciate bonemeal and compost being added to the planting hole or potting mix. Feed with an organic fertilizer according to package instructions. Follow pruning instructions that came with your plant to encourage new growth and more flowers.

**How to harvest:** Pick the hips when they are round and brightly colored, which is normally in the fall. Be sure to pick enough to last for many months. Cut off the dark furry tops and the bottom stem.

**How to make tea:** Rose hips have tiny hairs in their center that must be removed before making tea. You can do this by cutting the hips in half vertically and removing the hairs with a teaspoon. Or, you can wait until later. In either case, the next step is to put the hips in a food processor and coarsely chop them. Be sure not to grind them too much! Spread the chopped hips on a baking sheet and put them in a warm oven set to the lowest temperature. Every five minutes move the hips around to try to ensure they dry out completely, which should take about 20 minutes. If you didn't remove the hairs previously, do so now by putting the hips in a sieve and shaking it until all of the hairs fall through. Store the dried hips in a sealed glass container in a dry, dark location.

To brew the tea, place 1 teaspoon of dried rose hips in a saucepan with 1 1/2 cups of water and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes. Strain into a teacup and serve hot. You can also make rose hip tea from freshly chopped rose hips. Tea made from fresh rose hips will not be as strong as tea made from dried rose hips.

**Bonus tips:** Because you are going to use the fruit from the pollinated flowers (rose hips) to make tea, don't use chemical fertilizers or pest or disease control on your roses.

**Other choices:** Additional fruits Liversidge includes in her tea choices are blueberries, lemons, myrtle and strawberries.



# Tea From Flowers



## **Lavender,** *Lavandula angustifolia*

Lavender is an “old world” member of the mint family that is native to the Mediterranean areas of Europe and Africa with a range that extends into India and Asia. Of its 39 species, one stands out as the best for making tea, the common (or, English) lavender, *Lavandula angustifolia*. Liversidge likes the cultivars *Lavandula angustifolia* ‘Hidcote’ and *Lavandula angustifolia* ‘Munstead.’ Both are hardy to about 5 degrees F.

**How to grow:** Lavender is easiest to grow when purchased as a small plant from a nursery rather than trying to grow it from seed. It wants a sunny location and can be grown in the ground or in a pot. If growing in the garden, avoid low-lying areas because lavender resents wet feet. If growing in a pot, take care not to overwater. If your garden soil is heavy, add gravel or sand to improve drainage. Pruning may be required to keep the plant to a manageable size.

**How to harvest:** The flowers are primarily used to make the tea and can be picked and used right away or harvested and dried for later use. Leaves may also be added to the tea. To dry lavender, cut long stems before the flowers fully open, tie the stems together and hang the bunches in a cool dark place with good air circulation to prevent mold from forming. Drying time will vary. When the flowers feel crispy, dry and brittle, break them and a few leaves off and store them in a sealed container in a dark cupboard.

**How to make tea:** Warm a cup with hot water and discard the water. If using fresh lavender, put two or three flower heads and a few leaves in a tea bag, place the tea bag in a cup, pour boiled water into the cup, cover the cup with a saucer or lid and let the tea steep for three minutes. Remove the tea bag and enjoy. If using dried lavender, add a teaspoon of flowers and leaves into a tea bag and steep for three to four minutes.

**Bonus tips:** Other [reasons to grow lavender](#), besides its attractive growth habit and colorful flowers, are that it can be used for culinary purposes, and is deer and rabbit resistant.

**Other choices:** Additional flowers Liversidge includes in her tea choices are calendula, chamomile, honeysuckle, jasmine, rose, saffron and violet.

# Tea From Roots



**Echinacea**, *Echinacea augustifolia*, *Echinacea pallida*, *Echinacea purpurea*

Echinaceas, also known as coneflower or purple coneflower, are native to various regions of the United States. They are popular garden plants because they produce colorful cone-shaped flowers that attract pollinators.

**How to grow:** Echinaceas are tall plants that work well in the middle or back of a sunny border or for adding height to an arrangement in a pot. Roots must be three years old before harvesting. If you are just starting a “tea garden” and want to make tea from echinaceas, it’s best to start with plants purchased from a nursery. Plants for future harvests can be started from seed. If growing in the garden, mix compost or well-rotted manure into the garden bed. If growing in a pot, mix 50 percent perlite or fine grit into the potting soil to improve drainage.

**How to harvest:** The reason the plants need to be three years old or more to harvest for tea is to give the roots time to grow large enough for them to be divided — a portion to make tea and a portion to replant. Harvest the roots in the fall, cut off a portion large enough to replant, scrub dirt off the portions you are keeping for tea, coarsely chop them, spread them on a baking tray or fine mesh sieve and place them in a warm, dry place, turning them every so often to ensure even drying. Leaves and flowers can be picked throughout the summer and dried in the same manner. Pick the flowers just before they fully open. Store the roots in a separate container from the leaves and flowers.

**How to make tea:** Place two pinches of echinacea root and 1 1/2 cups of water in a small saucepan, cover and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes. Add a pinch of leaves and flowers and steep for three minutes. Strain into a teacup to serve.

**Bonus tip:** Some people are allergic to echinaceas.

**Other choices:** Liversidge also describes how to make tea from roots of angelica, chicory, ginger and licorice.