

Hogtown HomeGrown

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Tea time

Buttermilk white with apple green polka dots, the squat ceramic coffee pot sat near the sink on the counter in Granny's kitchen. Tea time was twice a day, one hour before every lunch and dinner, when the whistling tea kettle was put on to boil and Granny would place tea bags in the coffee pot. Ritually winding the strings around the handle, she secured the bags before pouring in the steaming water. The lid clinked into place and the bags did their work while she finished cooking. Steeping finished and the bags removed, the tea is left to cool, for no Southern housewife of a certain age would dare serve cloudy tea. Cloudy tea shows a lack of preparation and ritual, since it is the result of hot tea poured over ice to hastily cool it. The ideal? A tall glass filled with ice that crackles as the tea is poured over it.

While Granddaddy liked iced tea with every meal, summer and winter, after dinner he would have a cup of hot tea. Compared to the ritual for iced tea, this tea time was boring—a tea bag and boiling water served in a china cup and saucer, with a spoon. He would usually have it plain or with a slice of lemon. I think this might have been a habit he picked up in his travels. Occasionally, when I was young, I would imitate him by asking Granny for a cup of tea just like Granddaddy, because I knew he would stay at the table until I finished. We would linger in conversation and I can only imagine his amusement as he watched me take tiny, hesitant sips of the very hot, very tart tea accented by a floating slice of lemon.

When our children were young, tea time became a time of bonding and friendship. Around four on most weekday afternoons, two exhausted neighborhood mothers, with a combined total of six children under the age of twelve, plus whatever neighborhood kids were tagging along that day, would send the kids outside to play while a small saucepan of water with two teabags was put on to boil. At this point in the day, flavor was not the objective. We sought a pure burst of caffeinated energy designed to last until 9:30pm when the oldest was finally asleep! While it steeped we alternately talked about our day, the kids and what we planned to cook for dinner—punctuated by exclamations of “Close the door!”

Two new tea times have come into my life over the past few years, both a result of grown children and an empty nest. First, the treasured afternoon pots of tea and plates of cookies with a couple of the young ladies I have known since their childhoods. When they went away to college, they would call during school breaks and come over to our house for tea and conversation. These ladies-only, no-holds-barred conversations are always a couple of intense hours as we catch up, but ultimately, a very affirming ritual for all.

My latest tea time is with my husband. After dinner we tend to work in separate rooms on our computers, but invariably one of us will put on our whistling tea kettle and call out to the other, “Want a cup of tea?” We stop what we are doing and take a moment—for conversation, catching up, planning or just laughing. As with all the tea times in my life, it has never been about the tea, but the familiar rituals and conversations that I treasure.

What's Fresh Right Now?

Beans—green filet, yellow/wax

Beets

Bok choy—tatsoi, red/green pac choi

Broccoli

Cabbage—green, napa/chinese

Carrots—orange/purple/yellow/red

Cauliflower

Citrus—pink/red/white grapefruit, oranges, tangerines, tangelo, sour orange, meyer lemon, calamondin, kumquat, juices

Cucumbers—mini seedless

Fennel

Garlic—chives

Greens—collards, mustards, arugula, chard, mizuna, asian stir-fry mix, escarole

Herbs—chervil, cilantro, parsley, dill, rosemary, basil, chives

Honey

Kale—red/white russian, tuscan, curly

Kohlrabi—green/purple

Lettuce—salad mix, red/green romaine and leaf lettuce, crispy frill, bibb, buttercrunch

Onions—white, green

Peas—snow, sugar snap

Peppers—red/green/orange/yellow sweet, jalapeno, poblano

Potatoes—small white

Radish—globe, daikon, easter egg, french breakfast

Shoots, Sprouts and Microgreens

Sweet Potatoes

Tomatoes—grape, beefsteak, heirloom, green

Turnips—white, purple-topped, golden

Yuca (cassava)

Local and Fresh— Chervil

What in the world is chervil? It's an herb that looks like parsley, but has delicate, feather-like leaves. It tastes like parsley, but lighter, with an anise or licorice flavor.

Often used in French cooking, chervil is part of a group of herbs referred to in recipes as *fines herbes* or *aux fines herbes*. Finely chopped (minced) and added at the last minute for maximum freshness and flavor, *fines herbes* usually combine parsley, chervil, chives and tarragon.

Try adding chervil to salads, soups or vinaigrettes. The anise-like flavor combines well with fennel, enhancing the taste of both.

Air dry in small bunches in a dark, cool place—like a closet. Crumble dried chervil and store in airtight jars placed in a cabinet or drawer to reduce light exposure.

Vinaigrette aux fines herbes

INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tablespoon stone-ground or dijon mustard
- zest and juice of a lemon
- 2 Tablespoons cider vinegar
- 3/4 cup olive oil
- pinch each salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 Tablespoons minced fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 Tablespoon minced fresh chervil
- 1 Tablespoon minced fresh chives
- 1 Tablespoon minced fresh tarragon

DIRECTIONS

Combine all ingredients in a jar with a tight-fitting lid. Shake well to combine.

Store in refrigerator and use within three days. Try on salad greens or cooked potatoes.



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Herbed Split Pea Soup

INGREDIENTS

2 Tablespoons olive oil
1 large leek, cut in half lengthwise, both white and light green thinly sliced
3-4 carrots, quartered lengthwise and diced
3 stalks celery, halved lengthwise and thinly sliced
3-4 small potatoes, diced (about 2 cups)
2 Tablespoons mixed dried herbs (basil, thyme, sage and chervil are good choices)
4 cups dried green split peas
1 cup white wine (optional)
water to cover mixture by one inch
3 cups chopped fresh herbs (mostly parsley, plus a combination of chervil, basil and sage)
zest and juice of 1 Meyer lemon OR 1 regular lemon
1 Tablespoon Meyer Lemon Infused Olive Oil (January 2015) OR plain olive oil
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

In a large pot (at least 6 quarts) with a lid, heat olive oil over medium-low heat. Stir in leeks to completely coat with oil. Reduce heat, cover and sweat until soft.

Remove cover and raise heat to medium-high. Add carrots and celery. Sauté, stirring occasionally, until carrots are crisp-tender. Stir in potatoes and dried herbs and cook for five minutes, stirring constantly.

Add split peas and wine, with enough water to cover mixture by one inch. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, cover and simmer until peas become creamy and potatoes are soft, stirring occasionally. Add additional water if necessary, since peas will absorb water as they cook.

Stir in fresh herbs, lemon zest and juice, and olive oil. Let simmer uncovered for 15 minutes. Taste and add salt and pepper as desired.

Serve hot. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Fennel and Orange Salad

INGREDIENTS

1 large fennel bulb, stems and fronds removed, thinly sliced into half rings
2 large oranges, peel cut off (ambersweet, navels or red navels are good choices)
1/4 cup dried cranberries

DIRECTIONS

Place fennel into large bowl. Section oranges over bowl to catch the juices. Add orange sections and cranberries. Stir well. Chill before serving. Cover and refrigerate leftovers.

Tricks and Tips

Pease porridge hot.
Pease porridge cold.
Pease porridge in the pot, nine days old.

Some like it hot.
Some like it cold.
Some like it in the pot, nine days old.

While I would never recommend eating nine-day-old soup, cooking up a batch of soup is a great way to cook once and eat twice—or more!

In our home, soup is served for dinner on the day it is made. Since my husband grew up eating split pea soup with grilled cheese sandwiches, that is our first meal. Leftovers are then divided in two. I fill a quart jar to be stored in the refrigerator for a lunch later in the week. The rest goes into a doubled ziptop freezer bag for a future meal. Word to the wise—thaw the bag in a large container—even if it leaks, you will still have all the soup!

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Date Filling

INGREDIENTS

2 cups whole pitted dates (not chopped)

2 cups orange juice (sour and sweet oranges make a good combination)

1 Tablespoon fresh lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

In a saucepan, mix together dates, orange and lemon juices.

Heat over medium heat until mixtures begins to bubble.

Stirring constantly, cook until smooth

OR

cool slightly and puree in a food processor.

Orange Walnut Bars with Date Filling

INGREDIENTS

1 cup each whole wheat flour, brown sugar and rolled oats
2 teaspoons baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
zest and juice of an orange (sour or sweet orange, your choice!)
1 stick butter (1/2 cup), melted
1 egg, lightly beaten
1 cup walnuts, finely chopped
1 cup Date Filling

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly butter an 8x8 baking pan.

Mix together whole wheat flour, brown sugar, rolled oats, baking soda, salt and zest of orange, with melted butter. Divide mixture in half.

Mix juice of orange with egg. Add to one half of flour mixture, stir until completely mixed. Spread lightly into prepared pan.

Use a teaspoon to drop small dollops of date filling onto batter in pan. If necessary, use a fork to lightly spread filling more evenly.

Mix chopped walnuts into remaining half of flour mixture to create nut topping. Spread topping evenly across the date filling, Use the back of a fork to light press topping into a compact, even layer.

Bake in preheated oven until bottom and edges are lightly browned. Allow to cool completely before cutting into 16 squares.

Place leftovers in a tightly sealed container and store at room temperature.