



Blackcreek Creek Nursery

Home Grown Tea – FAQs

What are Tea Plants?

Tea plants are evergreen plants that are members of the Camellia family. The plant species used for tea production is Camellia sinensis.

Can any camellia produce tea?

While it is possible to produce tea from the leaves of other camellia species besides Camellia sinensis, the resulting beverage may not taste, look, or smell the same as traditional tea. All camellia species contain certain chemical elements that when processed for tea, may give you different results.

Where can I grow tea?

Tea from Camellia sinensis can be grown in most mild regions of the USA and around the world. In the USA, they do best grown outdoors in climate zones 7-8-9. Tea can be grown in colder climates if they are grown outdoors in warm weather, indoors in cold weather. Tea will grow well in a moist but well drained, organic rich soil. They can grow in Full sun to part shade.

How many plants do I need to produce tea?

That depends on how much you want to make. If you have a small family and only drink tea occasionally, then 1-2 mature plants should be fine. If you have a larger family or want to produce more tea, then start with 10-12 plants and increase as plants as needed.

When do I harvest tea?

We recommend letting your plant grow for a few years with limited plucking. When you do start to harvest, you only want to harvest the soft tender green growth when the plant is actively growing. Plants in the USA usually go into a dormant period in Fall-Winter. So harvesting in zones 7-8-9 would be anywhere from March-September depending on your climate.

Why do I want to have bushy plants?

Because you are harvesting fresh tea from the tips of branches, you want to have as many branches as possible. The bushier the plant, the more tea you can harvest. Training your tea plants for optimal harvest yield is recommended.

How do I train my tea plants for optimal harvesting of tea leaves?

To start the training process, let your plants grow with minimal pruning for 2-3 years or until the plant is about 3-4' tall. Just before **your** spring while the plant is still dormant, *for us in Georgia that's mid to late February*, trim your plant in half. All of that new energy with the onset of spring growth will send out a frenzy of new growth and your plants will start to become a lot bushier. With the onset of growth, you can begin harvesting tea and you can do so throughout the growing season. The next year, at the same time, you may want to do a light trim, say 8-10" off the top or more if you even want a bushier plant. You can do this pre-spring trim for several years, but if your plant starts to get a little taller than you want it to, then come in during pre-spring and do a heavy trim like you did the first year.

How big will my tea plants get?

Your tea plants, if left alone with no pruning, can get upwards of 10-12 feet tall. For optimal tea production, we suggest 3' feet tall or waist high to you!

Do Tea Plants Flower? What is the purpose of the flowers?

Yes! Tea Plants are a member of the flowering genus of plants called Camellia, which do flower. Plants flower as a way of reproduction. Flowers that are pollinated will usually form seed pods. When ripe, the seeds fall to the ground and seedlings soon emerge. Seedlings are genetically different from the mother plant.

Tea plants grown for tea have very few flowers because the constant pruning and plucking prevent the plant from going into a full reproduction mode.

Can I grow tea in containers?

Absolutely. They make excellent container plants and will fit in nicely as an evergreen shrub on your deck, porch or patio.

Can I use regular potting soil to grow my camellias in containers?

Be very careful of using a general purpose potting soil with Tea plants. Usually, these soils are formulated for vegetables and bedding plants and are designed to hold water to keep your plants from drying out. Because of the components used in commercial potting mixes, soils are usually very compact leaving very little air space for your roots to breathe. Tea Plants like to have a soil that has good drainage and good oxygen. We use a finely ground aged pine bark mix that has some moisture retention, but the water drains away from the roots instead of compacting the soil

Where can I get a container mix?

We sell our own custom blended **Blackcreek Creek Potting & Planting Mix** for Camellias & Tea plants.

What types of plants do I need to grow green, black or oolong tea?

All tea is made from the same plant – Camellia sinensis. It's not the plant that determines what tea you get, but the way you make it. It's like potatoes. French fries, mashed potatoes, and potato chips are all made from potatoes. But it's the way they are processed that makes them what they turn out to be.

What is the difference between Green, Black and Oolong teas?

- Green Tea – fresh leaves are not allowed to oxidize, or to ferment. Leaves are not bruised. It's the purest and simplest to make. Caffeine content is the lowest in green tea.
- Oolong Tea – leaves are allowed to partially oxidize, or ferment. Twisting, cutting and bruising of the leaves produces a light coppery color and mild taste. Slightly higher caffeine content compared to green tea.
- Black Tea – Leaves are allowed to fully oxidize or ferment. Twisting, cutting and bruising of the leaves produces a heavy bodied tea with a nice aroma and rich deep earthy taste. Caffeine content is highest in black teas.

Tea Plant Problems?

Tea plants can have pest problems such as Aphids, Mites & Tea Scale. An organic oil spray, All Seasons Oil, or Neem Oil is all that is recommended for tea to control any pest issues. If Oil sprays are used as a preventative, you'll catch problems before they become big problems.

Disease problems are few but when they do occur can be attributed to poor soils, improper planting, climate incompatibility or lack of proper care such as nutrients and hydration.

Best Care Recommendations

We recommend providing your plants with adequate nutrients, organic if possible. HollyTone is our #1 go to for Tea Plants. Provide your plants with adequate hydration. Letting them dry out or staying saturated with water is not optimal and can cause root problems or death.

Blackcreek Nursery & Garden Website – www.blackcreeknsy.com Blog and growing information!