FAQ (also on website)

1. So what makes Tea Tavern's teas special?
   We care about the tea, our community, and helping our community grow. As a result, we attempt to find tea that has the fewest growth intervention techniques used on it. This includes use of pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers, and tipping for growth encouragement, or anything else that we find might adjust the strength and health of the tea plant and its flavors.
   As a result, Tea Tavern teas are are chosen with this in mind, such as teas grown through low intervention farming with just enough pruning to keep the plant healthy, or even are picked from wild plants!

2. Why gongfu tea instead of a big tea pot?
   Gongfu brewing uses a much larger amount of leaves for the amount of water that is used at a time. As a result, brewing is significantly faster, the flavor (not the bitterness) of the leaves is stronger, one has more control over the particular flavor desired to be brewed, and gongfu allows rebrewing many more times.

   Want a brewing kit for gongfu? See our Adventurer's Brewing Kit!

   Want to learn more about gongfu brewing first? Read our brewing guide or come ask one of the traveling brewmasters at a Traveling Tea Tavern event!

3. What is the simplest way to do gongfu brewing, with the least effort?
   Basic gongfu uses the following tools as a basis: Gawian (brewing vessel), a serving cup, and tea cups for drinking. If the serving cup is missing, however, it is common to pour directly into the tea cups, attempting to share as equally as possible.
   With this in mind, if you aren't serving people, one could skip the serving cup and tea cups, and just release the tea into a drinking mug.

4. What are ways to describe the flavors of tea, so I know what to ask for? (How to know which teas are for you)
   People who are new to tea can usually relate the practice of describing "tea tasting notes" to that of fancy alcoholic beverages or chocolates. Tea has a wide variety of flavors and varying strength in those flavors. The Tea Tavern tends to use the following descriptors, but note that more descriptions are used by other places, as well.

   - Nutty
   - Flowery
   - Grassy
   - Smokey
   - Earthy
   - Fruity

5. Do you make your own tea blends?
   For the Tea Tavern's home, the term "blend" tends to be used because people expect a mixture of herbs to produce fun flavors, such as is common in places such as English tea rooms. Rather than mixing the herbs ourselves, however, we work with vendors to bring mindfully grown herbal blends such as The Mosscap Hearth and Rain of a Mosscap.
   As referenced in other places such as China, however, the creation of "tea blends" is primarily an outcome of the industrialisation of tea production to reduce costs, flavors, and qualities. Teas from different regions or various parts of the tea plant, such as leaves and stems, are "blended" together. This process ensures a consistent product but often overlooks the unique characteristics that individual teas can offer. As a result, the Tea Tavern is no "opposed" to selling a blend, but they are not the focus, as they are usually not the same quality as single origin sourced teas.

6. How do you tell the quality of a tea?
   The easiest option is to smell and taste the tea yourself.
   - Does the tea smell like chemicals? It likely won't be a good tea.
   - Does it just taste unpleasant or feel weird? It is possible that the particular tea is not to your preference, but it is also possible that you are tasting/feeling pesticides or chemical fertilizers that were used in the growth process. So if you don't like the particular tea, just don't drink that one, and look for one you do like, instead.

   For more delicate teas like whites and greens, one can use the resilience of the leaves a metric for quality. Can they be brewed in boiling water and not become bitter?

   For example, Tea Tavern's brewmasters always brew Master's Green with boiling water and it won't become bitter.

   Contrarily, Tea Tavern's brewmasters do not recommend brewing Phidim White Prakash with boiling water, as the strength becomes too strong too quickly, and the flavor become what most people call "bitter". As a result, if tea becomes unpleasant because of how strong the flavor is, can you make the brew taste pleasant again by adding water?
   The Tea Tavern's keeper (and this FAQ's writer) regularly over-brews

Phidim White Prakash, for example. (^^;)7

As a result, the keeper often adds water to Phidim White Prakash brews, fixing all the bitterness that is otherwise found!

This brings us to the last easy quality-checking method. Tea farmers will sometimes take a small amount of leaf and brew it in a bowl of hot water. The tea will be left to brew for multiple hours, and when they finally come back to it, the tea may be weak, but is it pleasant?
Maybe they were good leaves and prepared wrong, thus doesn't taste good.
Maybe they used chemical fertilizers or pesticides, and since it was brewing for so long, they actually released into the brew.
Whatever the case, a long steeping time is sure to extract as much from the leaves as is going to happen, for the most holistic leaf flavor.

7. I see you have more than just "green tea" and "black tea".. so what kind of tea is there and what do those mean? What are the differences?
   Due to classifications of tea crossing different cultures and languages, there are debates and confusion from meanings and translations. As a result, these are the terms and classifications that are influenced by Tony Gebely's book "Tea, a User's Guide" and used at the Tea Tavern.
   White: White tea is made by withering fresh leaves for several days and then drying them.
   Green: Tea made from leaves that have been withered, fixed (AKA: Kill Green), and dried
   Yellow: Yellow tea is defined by a unique processing step where small batches of tea leaves are wrapped in cloth bundles after fixing, allowing them to yellow.
   Oolong: During the oolong production process, oxidation is initiated, controlled, and halted before the leaves are considered fully oxidized.
   Black/Red: A mostly oxidized tea from fresh tea leaves that are withered, rolled, oxidized, and dried.
   Hei Cha (Dark): Teas that have been fermented or made to be fermented.
   Pu-erh: Tea leaves grown in Yunnan Province and are descendants of Camellia sinensis var. assamica.
   Shu (cooked) Pu-erh: A quickly fermented tea that undergoes the "wet piling" process, the process in which tea leaves are put into piles and moisture is added and controlled over a period of several hours to several weeks depending on the type.
   Sheng (raw) Pu-erh: Is made the same as shu, but without the wet piling process. Rather these are made and often left to age.
   Purple: A tea with genetics that make the leaf on the plant purple rather than green in color.

8. Do you have a recommendation for teas to try? Teas to gift?
   One of the first recommendations for people is always a wild picked tea. This is because they are much more difficult to brew bitter and avoids the possible toxins in other teas that result in jitters, sickness, and sometimes difficulty sleeping after drinking. If you wanted to know what a variety taste like, see the Wild Tea Sampler.

9. What is the importance of water used to brew the tea?
   Water dissolves/dissociates the solids in tea leaves, which is what gives the brew its flavor. This can be either supported or hindered by the materials already in the water. The easiest way to see how this can happen is if there is already a lot in the water. Water that has been saturated with salt (of any kind) will extract fewer materials from the tea than purified water with nothing in it. The color change will be less noticeable.
   Another factor is if the materials in the water will react with the tea. One basic science experiment that teaches "how to see evidence of chemical change" is by adding an acid to tea; this is to see the color change. So if the materials in the water are particularly basic or acidic, then they will have an effect on the tea's flavor.
   Lastly, if one is drinking particularly hard or metallic tasting water, then it will be very likely to just mix the flavor of the tea with the unpleasant metallic and hard water flavors. Not necessarily remove them.

   With all these factors in mind, the Tea Tavern sells brewing components that help people prepare tea water as well as tea! One would obtain purified water (reverse osmosis or distilled), which can often be found in many markets and add 1ml of each in the mineral pair.
   fill, spritz, spritz, boil, and the water is ready to brew tea!

10. Why re-mineralize purified water (reverse osmosis or distilled)?
    While one can use a good local tap water, filtered, bottled, or just a purified water without re-mineralizing, the brewers of the Tea Tavern find that the minerals in the water help exemplify or mellow the particular flavors of a tea. Thus, they not only help extract some materials in tea, but they sometimes react with the tea in a minor and possibly favorable way.

    If someone doesn't like grassiness in tea, perhaps they will use the minerals for Autumn water.

    If they want to influence the floweriness of the tea, perhaps they will prefer minerals for Springtide water.

    Or maybe one just want the true flavor of the tea and will use minerals for Original water to extract as much of the tea's true flavor as they can.

11. Do the teas of Tea Tavern have caffeine?
    All teas (camellia sinensis) naturally have caffeine. In order to attempt to remove their caffeine, people have figured out ways to "decaffeinate" them. These ways always include mixing some other chemical with the tea to make it react with or dissolve the caffeine. The Tea Tavern does not have the facilities to perform this extraction, but also may not want to given that these processes usually just *reduce* the amount of caffeine and possibly leave some other chemical behind that isn't talked about. Not that they *are* necessarily a concern, as one process uses large amounts of CO2 to react with the caffeine, but CO2 decaffeination is one of the more difficult options.

    This being said, the Tea Tavern does also sell herbs; some of which are from plants closely emulate the flavor of the tea plant.
    If you'd like an herb that steeps and tastes a lot like the tea plant, but has not be found to

naturally have caffeine, you may like the Shu Ya Bao (camellia crassicolumna). Alternatively, if you'd like a totally different flavor profile, perhaps you'd like the flowery cinnamon of The Mosscap Hearth.

Lastly, if you'd like to brows the herbals that the Tea Tavern has, please see the herb collection.

12. How much caffeine is in the tea that has caffeine?
    The Tea Tavern dreams to one day have the tooling for extracting caffeine to measure how much is in a particular tea, directly... But until that day, the true measurements for how much caffeine is in a particular tea will remain uncertain. For now, the Tea Tavern uses Caffeine Informer to help find likely quantities, as they are one of the few sources that link back to scientific articles.

13. What are the medicinal properties of Tea?
    Tavern Keeper here. You have my apologies, as this response will likely feel like a big non-answer.
    Tea is known to have *many* different chemicals that make up the plant. Some of the most commonly known are polyphenols, caffeine, and theanines. Yes, there are more, but stick with me here to give the example:

    Some research suggests that tea's caffeine (and other compounds) have an anti-diabetic effect due to how it affects the pancreas. Some people even add it to beverages as a pre-workout supplement to help with exercise performance. This comes with possible downsides of increased anxiety for some. Others fear caffeine addiction. Similarly, others appear entirely unaffected by caffeine.
    Polyphenols are a part of what have made "green tea" into the "medicine" that many treat green tea as. Polyphenols are about 30% of green tea's dry weight, and has anti-oxidant properties. They also produce the grassy flavor in tea that not everyone enjoys, and depending on the diet, not everyone needs additional anti-oxidants.

    Lastly, L-theanine is known to be a calming chemical. The combination of L-theanine and caffeine in tea results in what some call "a mindful awareness and focus" rather than a hyperactive, anxious mind.
    With all this together, we have to keep in mind the amount of the substance that we intake, if it is enough to actually make an effect, and keep in mind how it reacts with all the other chemicals present.
    So... how does the Tea Tavern handle the possible health benefits of tea?
    We'd recommend picking tea from the healthiest of tea plants, drinking tea for the enjoyment of the flavor, and listening to how your body reacts to what you consume.

    The healthiest tea plants, such as the low-intervention or wild picked teas, will have the fewest harmful substances, such as absorbed pesticides or chemicals from fertilization, and will likely be the most potent in substances that are beneficial to one's health... and likely have a stronger flavor as a result. ;D

    Research has found that people who drink more tea tend to have healthier lives. The

reason is unclear to us currently, but if this is true, why make it unpleasant with tea that you dislike the flavor of? This makes it easier to consume more, thus obtain more of the associated health benefits.
Lastly, no mater how pleasant the particular tea is, think about how you react to tea and if you consider it "favorable". Should you feel anxious, make your stomach feel off, or get any other symptoms consistently found while drinking tea, then perhaps move to one of the herbals instead.
As for myself, I usually don't have tea on an empty (think "fasting" length of time without food) stomach. My stomach just regularly starts to have an unusual not-quite empty feeling that just feels weird when there is nothing else in it, along with the tea. As a result, early in the morning or late at night, I tend to drink some of the herbals, because I still want a warm flavored beverage.
This is all to say that tea is complex, and thus research is complex, especially as it relates to the human bodies.
So if tea has health benefits, then drink from the most healthy plants, and brew the most pleasant plants that you can obtain!

14. How do you store the tea?
    The simplest rule of thumb is to store tea in an air-tight, opaque container and at a cool (or "not hot") temperature.
    An air-tight container, because aromas around the tea will start to infuse with the tea (notice how "jasmine tea" is often a green tea without any Jasmine flowers mixed in);
    in an opaque container, because light will break down materials, thus flavors in the tea;
    and in a cool place, because chemicals and micro-organisms simply move slower at cooler temperatures.
    There is a lot more to this, and if you'd like to learn those specifics, feel free to ask through the "contact us" page. We'll help you figure out how to best store tea with your given goals.

15. How do you age the tea?
    If you thought "storage" was a complex topic, "aging" is even more so.
    In short, there is dry aging and humid aging for tea. (Wet is mostly used for fermentation while tea is being made, rather than after it has already been made... otherwise you might be thinking about Kombucha.)
    Dry aging is mostly enzymatic and occurs slowly over time, while humid aging includes more influence from micro-organisms.
    There is a lot more to aging tea, and if you'd like to learn those specifics, feel free to ask through the "contact us" page. We'll help you figure out how to best age tea with your given goals.

16. How long does the tea last?
    This is mostly related to how volatile the aromas of the particular tea are. If it is very aromatic, it will likely start to fade in flavor over 2-4 years... this is also assuming that it is not the type of tea that ages. Since most tea "ages" rather than "loses flavor", the older the tea is, the more "different" the flavor becomes. For example, the 1995 "Green Pu-erh" was made in 1995, and has a strong flavor distinctly found in long aged tea.

So, a tea that you like today, may be one that you like less next year, and become one you love in 3 years.
When stored in stable temperature and airflow conditions, though, teas should retain flavor for many years.

17. I'm struggling to brew good tea... :(
What should I do? -
The following are the main factors that we have found contribute to a tea's taste, aside from the quality of the leaves.
Quality of water, the amount of water compared to amount of leaf, the temperature of the water, and the amount of time steeping. So...
Are you using good water for tea? (Few dissolved substances, like less than 200 PPM if you know what that means?)
Have you tried using more or less leaf?
Have you tried a higher or lower temperature?
Have you tried steeping for more or less time?
Well, even if you haven't, feel free to reach out on the Tea Tavern's contact age. We'll do our best to help you figure out how to brew better. :)

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