

Reasoning and Prioritization Matrix: Is the tea likely to be healthier?

Assessing the relative healthiness of a tea is made within the following context:

- **Different farming methods can impact the healthfulness of a tea.** Key farming considerations include:
 - Use of pesticides to prevent insect infestation of the tea plants
 - Use of fertilizers to improve the growth speed or volume of the plants in various areas
 - Indiscriminate pruning to increase the volume of harvestable tea leaves
 - The elevation of the tea farm
- **Tea is not always good for people**
 - Improperly stored tea can contain toxic or harmful growths
 - A person's tolerance for tea byproducts or chemicals is highly individual
 - Tea can make some people ill for a variety of reasons
- **Many widely-held beliefs about tea's health benefits need more research to be verified**
 - (Needs link to evidence) Some benefits of drinking tea, such as using it as a digestive aid, *are* proven and are true
 - Tea can have as much, if not more, caffeine than coffee; this makes it a potentially *unhealthy* option for some people

In light of the above and the vast array of various tea varieties that exist, how does the Tea Tavern determine whether tea is the best, healthiest possible choice for both the tavern's patrons and the community as a whole?

The Farming Process

As the tea plant (*Camellia Sinensis*) ages, some people describe the flavor of the prepared leaves to have a different, more complex flavor, than the younger plants do. The Tea Tavern hasn't been able to find the the oldest tea plant nor an estimated life span but did find that some, still living plants, have an age estimate of over 1000 years old. As a result, if we aim to ensure that tea trees live healthy lives for as long as possible, it is essential to avoid practices that harm their ability to thrive. An example of this may be draining nutrients from the soil, a practice employed by (QUEST:

find research) wheat or cacao farms.

Pesticides

Using pesticides means there is a proven risk that those pesticides may be transferred to the tea and, ultimately, ingested by the tea drinker. It is a deeply studied and well-recorded fact that the ingestion of excess pesticides harms human health.

Additionally, the chemical composition of what we eat can have a strong impact on how it tastes.

This is why the use of pesticides in tea farming is believed to cause tea drinkers to become ill from drinking the tea. The tea plant absorbs the pesticides, which can not be removed from the leaves after harvesting and remain in the tea leaves. Brewing subsequently releases the pesticides into the beverage when the tea is brewed. Not only do the pesticides impact the taste of the tea, but they also increase the risk of harm to our tavern patrons.

To remove this risk and also maintain the highest possible standards for taste, the Tea Tavern does not purchase teas that are grown on farms that use pesticides.

Fertilizers

The excess use of fertilizers in tea production has long been an issue researchers and tea farmers have struggled to address. Many studies have been conducted to find safer ways to fertilize tea crops. While many organic fertilizing methods appear to be decreasing the harm to the environment and potential risk of chemical ingestion by tea drinkers, the risks of excess fertilization in tea from around the world remain.

Additionally, excess fertilization alters the chemical makeup of the tea plant itself, adding chemicals that would not be present in an organic plant. This is not inherently problematic, but it is nearly impossible to assess the specific fertilizer being used or its full impact on the tea plant itself. For example, if a plant is provided additional nutrients to foster increased or faster growth, and it does grow more, this will likely change the amount of "healthy" chemicals a plant would normally produce or use. And, the more of the plant there is -- i.e., plant biomass -- the more resources are needed to maintain the plant, meaning the amount of healthy chemicals a plant can organically produce is literally spread thinner. This can result in a tea that is not only "different," but less potent.

Aggressive Pruning

In line with the concept of decreased potency from the plants, another harvesting practice used to accumulate more leaves is pruning tea plants in such a way the volume of tea leaves produced increases. An example of this is called "tipping". Tipping is the removal of the terminal bud and the top few leaves of a shoot. This method encourages the growth of lateral branches, increasing the bush's leaf production capacity. There are, however, several methods of pruning tea plants, each

with various benefits and drawbacks. For tea pruning to be beneficial to the plant, the correct method should be employed. As a result, the farmed teas that have low amounts of harvesting practices used, we will add "low intervention" into the name or description.

Even when a correct pruning method is selected, however, in large-scale operations where volume is prioritized over general plant health, it is safe to assume that the resulting tea will be less potent. Instead of energy being expended on the complex chemical processes that give tea leaves their flavor, the tea plant is required to almost constantly produce new growth and expend its chemical resources over a larger volume of leaves.

Given the large impact of each of these farming variables on the resulting tea product, the Tea Tavern always attempts to learn as much as possible about the farming methods used by source tea plantations.

Alternately, as exemplified by our wild-grown plant offerings and low intervention offerings, we may source some teas that have not been exposed to pesticides, fertilization, or aggressive pruning at all.

Heavy Metals

To Be Researched. If you want to help tavern keepers research this aspect, email quests (a) tea-tavern.com

Widely Held Beliefs About Tea Health Benefits

Tea and Caffeine

Similarly, there is always caffeine in tea (*camelia sinensis*) unless it is chemically removed.

So, any chemical health benefits tea offers will always be offset by an increase in caffeine consumption. In this way, tea becomes similar to medicine in that one should always ask whether the "benefits" of drinking tea are significant enough to accept any possible negative impacts.

Ultimately, this is up to the individual to decide, but the Tea Tavern is focused on improving people's health and well being.

If the trade-off between increased caffeine consumption and health benefits associated with that particular tea is not *clearly better* for a person, it should not be portrayed as a "healthier choice." With this said, some people may have truly experienced the benefits of the tea in question firsthand and have deemed it worth any potential negative impacts. In that case, we can make recommendations based on that foundation of knowledge.

For individuals who have a serious concern about or reason to avoid caffeine, it's important to note that a healthier tea *may* have more caffeine than other comparable, less healthy teas. They should not be offered the caffeinated tea option in this case, even if it is, in some ways, healthier. It's quite possible that, for these individuals, true tea (*camellia sinensis*) is *not* a better beverage.

This is why the Tea Tavern also offers beverages made from other plants such as *camellia crassicolumna*, a cousin to the tea species that has not been found to contain caffeine, or Roobios, leaves from a red bush in Africa that have many healthy benefits but are also naturally caffeine free.

Green Tea and Longevity

Some research, much touted in the media, indicates that green tea may increase a person's longevity due to its ability to reduce the risk of often terminal conditions. It is worth noting, however, that in many of these studies, an unreasonably large amount of green tea has to be consumed daily to receive the potential health benefits.

For this reason, the Tea Tavern does not encourage consuming green tea to obtain its oft-cited health benefits.

TLDR: The Tea Tavern prioritizes products that are comparatively more healthy than other options that may be more widely available or that simply possess fewer health benefits.

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