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## 'Tea time'

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TEA - photo by andrew smith/photography editor

Though Jamaicans have their own definition of tea, the original comes from the *camellia sinensis*, an evergreen shrub that may grow up to 60 feet in the wild. When cultivated for harvest, the bushes are kept at a height of about three feet. There are over 3,000 varieties of tea, each with its own specific characteristics.

What determines the classification of black, oolong, white or green is how the leaves are processed. The main difference in the varieties is how much oxygen the leaves are allowed to absorb during processing. A lot of oxygen produces dark-coloured teas, but little oxygen results in green tea and unprocessed leaves are called white tea.

For Jamaicans, tea is any bush, root or leaf that can be used to make tea and green tea is any tea bag (popular brands being Lipton and Twinings). However, green tea makes up approximately 10 per cent of the world's tea.

### Production Process

The production process starts with withering, followed by pan-frying or steaming to prevent fermentation. Between steaming and drying, green tea leaves are rolled to give them the desired shape.

In China, this consists of eyebrow-shaped or twisted pieces, tight balls, flat needles, or curled whole leaves. Japanese green tea leaves are shiny green blades with reddish stalks and stems. Green tea is greenish-yellow in colour, with a grassy, astringent quality reminiscent of the fresh leaves.

Types of Jamaican (bush) teas

There are many types of Jamaican bush teas and **Food** went in search of some of the more popular ones for you:

1. **Cerasee (momordica charantia)**



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This is the most feared tea because of its bitter taste. It is believed to be a blood cleanser and sugar control agent for [diabetes](#). It is widely accepted that a fair consumption of this weekly will prevent colds, flu, headaches, jaundice, and bellyache. It is also said to reduce the risk of heart disease, lung cancer, and high blood pressure. But although some people brew it and keep it refrigerated for use instead of ice cold water, others believe too much of the tea will lead to [liver disease](#).

### 2. Fever grass (Andropogon Citratus (Cymbopogon))

Fever grass, otherwise called lemon grass, is a popular tea. It is grown wild in the rural parts of Jamaica and has a soothing, light lemon flavour.

Most people in the rural areas of the island drink it to recover quickly from high fever, hence the name. However, some like the taste, therefore, it is had day or night. Fever grass also provides relief from nervous headaches, as well as stomach and urinary problems. For those who suffer from gum ailments and external fungus, this herb can be helpful.

### 3. Sour sop leaf (Annona Muricata)

The sour sop fruit is versatile and can make juices, jams or ice cream. However, the leaves from the tree are used to make tea for such ailments as diabetes and nervous system problems. Sour sop leaves help to regulate the nervous system, relieve [insomnia](#), lower blood pressure, aids persons suffering from kidney and gall bladder problems, colds, fevers and even helps persons with worms. It is also a good first-aid remedy in cases of fainting or wounding.

### 4. Lime leaf

Lime leaf tea is the ultimate 'poor man's' tea. In the rural areas it is quite popular as it is an inexpensive way to soothe the palate in the mornings. All that is needed are a few leaves, hot water and sugar. There are no known medicinal properties of lime leaf tea, but people drink it for the lime lovely flavour.

### 5. Garlic (Allium Sativum)

Garlic is one of the most useful herbs. As a tea it is not the most tasty or the most socially acceptable aroma, but it has many medicinal benefits. Garlic is used to lower high blood pressure, for colds, coughs, whooping cough, earaches (using garlic oil), and bronchitis. It is also used for gastrointestinal ailments and again, country folk use it for an asthma attack to calm the wheezing. This versatile herb also relieves various problems associated with poor digestion and even has a stimulating effect on the sexual glands.

### 6. Ginger

Ginger tea has a harsh yet soothing taste. Many individuals use it to cure 'bad feelings', indigestion and relieve nausea and vomiting. It is also used to ward off colds, sore throat and the flu.

### 7. Donkey weed (Sylosanthes Hamata)

Donkey weed, otherwise called pencil flower, lady's ginger or cheesy toes, is often sweetened with milk and drunk as a hot beverage in Jamaica. It is used as a cold remedy and for kidney trouble. Some persons give it to teething children to relieve fever. At times it is used for relief from arthritis.

Additionally, this herb is used as an aphrodisiac. The sap is used externally to remove warts, sores and moles from the skin. At the same time it is safe enough for teething children who suffer fevers. This herb, used externally, rids the skin of imperfections.

### 8. Dandelion (Cassia Occidentalis)

Dandelion has been used for medicinal purposes since the 10th century and has proven value as a diuretic (flushing excess water from the body). It also promotes the flow of bile and stimulates the [appetite](#). Dandelion juice once enjoyed considerable popularity as a diuretic, laxative and remedy for rheumatism. In folk medicine, dandelion is also used as a remedy for haemorrhoids, gout, rheumatism, eczema, other skin conditions, and diabetes.

### 9. Black mint and peppermint

Black mint and peppermint are two of the favourite local bush teas. Mint teas are popular breakfast accompaniment, but some people have it any time of the day or night. It is also given to young children at bed time. Black mint, on the other hand, seems to be the less popular but has a good flavour.

Peppermint is versatile and is used for minor ailments, like nausea, headache, vomiting or any general nausea. Black mint aids the digestive system and is useful for persons suffering from cancer of the digestive tract. It facilitates the quick healing of wounds and abscesses. It is beneficial to persons who have 'smelly feet' because of its deodorising properties.

### 10. Leaf of life (*Bryophyllum Pinnatum*)

A succulent plant used in folk medicine. The plant is remarkable in that even a small piece of the leaf will grow. As the name suggests, life through a leaf. It is a good remedy for hypertension, bronchial problems, colds, bruises, boils, ulcers, insect bites, ear-aches, sprains, swelling, arthritis, tay-tay worm, and cleans bladder. The tea relieves colds, asthma and shortness of breath; sometimes with the addition of salt. It has been used to remove harmful bacteria from the intestines and to clean the bladder and urine. Persons who have high blood pressure also use it. The tea is used to bathe swellings, sprains and bruises. Fresh leaves can relieve headaches, earaches, sprains and pains. When applied to boils and abscesses, it helps them to mature. It is also said to relieve arthritis.

The plant is also called 'live forever' because, when leaves fall to the ground, new plants sprout from the scalloped edges and take root. Superstition associated with the plant include:

If a man fastens a leaf above his sweetheart's door and a new plant grows at each notch, he believes that she has been faithful to him.

In Jamaica, leaves are mashed with castor oil and applied to the breasts to treat mastitis in nursing mothers.

To alleviate the wheezing associated with asthma, the leaves are heated and the extracted juices mixed with honey; this is given to the patient by the spoonful.

For a cold or fever, boil five yam leaves with one leaf of life and drink as tea.

### 11. Rat ears (*Saliva Serotina (Micrantha)*)

Rat ears or joy weed is a native plant to Brazil. It grows on in the tropical and sub-tropical countries across the world. It is found on banks and rough pasture lands and is a low growing bushy herb used as a cover or bedding plant. There are about 10 varieties in Jamaica and they are used here as tea that aids in whooping cough. In the Far East the stems are eaten, cooked with fish and rice. In Jamaica it used for biliousness and colic. When boiled with 'garden bitters' and a little salt added, it is good for constipation. As a tea it is good for fever. The Maroons called it 'My medicine', good for almost everything. It is often recommended for constipation and use the clear juice squeezed out after applying salt to rub the chest. The leaves may be rubbed to the skin to control eczema. Boiled with wild mint, it is said to be good for the blood and is one of the most common medicines to clear the system.

### 12. Bissy (kola nut)

Bissy is the local name for kola nut. Since 1680 after it was brought to Jamaica on

a slave ship, it became a popular drink, especially among people in rural parishes. Bissy was formerly an ingredient in cola bottle drinks. It is widely regarded for its medicinal properties because of its effect as an antidote for poisons. It relieves menstrual cramps, headache, gout, rheumatism, jaundice, nausea, vomiting, and indigestion. Bissy is further used in birth control preparations, aids in the control of diabetes, and overweight. The drink comes from the seed that is grated and brewed. It can be sweetened with sugar or honey. Some people say they drink it when they are ill but some say they just drink it as a tea for the great flavour.

Other teas:

1. **Cocoa:** Good with a little milk and a dash of vanilla.
2. **Chocolate:** Old-time chocolate tea is made from grated chocolate, boiled with milk, cinnamon leaves, vanilla, orange rind. Best had with a bit of hard dough bread and from an enamel mug.
3. **Milo:** Loved by the younger children.
4. **Cucumber leaf:** Good for jaundice.
5. **Susumber leaf:** Cold reliever.
6. **Rice and pea bush:** Good for congestion and colds.
7. **Noni:** Lowers high blood pressure.
10. **Thyme leaf:** Aids in delivery
11. **Medina:** Good for cold, fever and male virility.
12. **Search-mi-heart:** As the name suggests, it is good for the heart.

**Sources:** [www.springhillherbal.com](http://www.springhillherbal.com); [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com); [www.star chefs.com](http://www.star chefs.com); *A-Z of Jamaica Heritage by Olive Senior*; *Gardening with Moris by Moris Sutherland*; *Institute of Jamaica*

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