



DID YOU KNOW...Where (sweet) Tea REALLY originated???

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Summerville, South Carolina

Birthplace of Sweet Tea

Welcome to Summerville, South Carolina, and welcome to the sweet life!

Sweet tea is a staple of South Carolina. As the birthplace of sweet tea and home to the first tea plants in America, this refreshing beverage is deeply rooted into our culture. Whether it's enjoyed from a crystal glass or a mason jar, sweet tea is a time-honored tradition in the Palmetto State. Summerville's name is reminiscent of its history. Situated on a pine-forested ridge, it was first inhabited in the late 1700s as Charlestonians and other inhabitants of the SC Lowcountry sought respite from the summer heat, mosquitoes and disease. It also boasts as the birthplace of sweet tea. As a new Charlestonian, I personally found this doubtful and perhaps simply something the town used for bragging rights—until I did my own research.

According to Whatscookingamerica.com (whatscookingamerica.net/history/icedteahistory.htm): The history of iced tea and sweet tea began in the **18th century**. In 1795, South Carolina was the first place in the United States where tea was grown and is the only state to ever have produced tea commercially. Most historians agree that the first tea plant arrived in this country in the late 1700s when French explorer and botanist André Michaux (1746–1802) imported it as well as other beautiful and showy varieties of camellias, gardenias and azaleas to suit the aesthetic and acquisitive desires of wealthy Charleston planters. He planted tea near Charleston at Middleton Barony, now known as Middleton Place Gardens.

By the 1800's the English and American cookbooks showed that tea had been served cold at least since the early 19th century, when cold green tea punches, heavily spiked with liquor, were popularized. The oldest recipes in print are made with green tea and not black tea and were called punches. The tea punches went by names such as Regent's Punch, named after George IV, the English prince regent between 1811 until 1820 and then king from 1820 to 1830.

By the middle of the 19th century, American versions of this punch began to acquire regional and even patriotic names, such as

Charleston's St. Cecilia Punch (named for the musical society whose annual ball it graced) and Savannah's potent version, Chatham Artillery Punch.

Iced tea's popularity paralleled the development of refrigeration when the icehouse, the icebox (refrigerator) and the commercial manufacture of pure ice were in place by the middle of the 19th century.



The 1839 cookbook "The Kentucky Housewife" by Mrs. Lettice Bryanon, was typical of the American tea punch recipes: "Tea Punch: Make a pint and a half of very strong tea in the usual manner; strain it, and pour it boiling (hot) on one pound and a quarter of loaf sugar. [*That's 2 1/2 cups white sugar.*] Add half a pint of rich sweet cream, and then stir in gradually a bottle of claret or of champagne. You may heat it to the boiling point, and serve it so, or you may send it round entirely cold, in glass cups."

Nearly 40 years later in **1879**, the oldest sweet tea recipe (ice tea) in print comes from a community cookbook called "Housekeeping in Old Virginia" by Marion Cabell Tyree. The recipe is as follows: "*Ice Tea: After scalding the teapot, put into it one quart of boiling water and two teaspoonfuls green tea. If wanted for supper, do this at breakfast. At dinnertime, strain, without stirring, through a tea strainer into a pitcher. Let it stand till teatime and pour into decanters, leaving the sediment in the bottom of the pitcher. Fill the goblets with ice, put two teaspoonfuls granulated sugar in each, and pour the tea over the ice and sugar. A squeeze of lemon will make this delicious and healthful, as it will correct the astringent tendency.*"

In **1884**, this may have been the first printed recipe using black tea that has become so universal today and could also be the earliest version of pre-sweetened iced tea, the usual way of making it in the South today. Mrs. D.A. (Mary) Lincoln, director of the Boston Cooking School, published "Mrs. Lincoln's Boston Cook Book: What to Do and What Not to Do in Cooking" in 1884. On page 112, there it is: iced tea, proving that the drink was not just a Southern drink. "*Ice Tea or Russian Tea: Make the tea by the first receipt, strain it from the grounds, and keep it cool. When ready to serve, put two cubes of block sugar in a glass, half fill with broken ice, add a slice of lemon, and fill the glass with cold tea.*"

At the **1893 Chicago World's Fair**, also called the Columbian Exposition, a concessionaire grossed more than \$2,000 selling iced tea and lemonade.



By the beginning of the **20th century**, after **1900**, iced tea became commonplace in cookbooks, and black tea began replacing green as the preferred tea for serving cold. The preference for black over green tea in an iced beverage came with the import of inexpensive black tea exports from India, Ceylon, South America and Africa.

It was at the **1904 World's Fair** in St. Louis that iced tea was popularized and commercialized (not

invented). Due to the hot summer of 1904, people ignored any hot drinks and went in search of cold drinks, including iced tea. Because of this, it changed the way the rest of Americans thought of tea, thus popularizing iced tea.

By **World War I**, Americans were buying special tall iced tea glasses, long spoons and lemon forks. By the **1930s**, people were commonly referring to the tall goblet in crystal sets as an “iced tea” glass. The American Prohibition (1920–1933) helped boost the popularity of iced tea because average Americans were forced to find alternatives to illegal beer, wine and alcohol. Iced tea recipes began appearing routinely in most Southern cookbooks during this time.

In **1928** in the Southern cookbook “Southern Cooking” Henrietta Stanley Dull (Mrs. S.R. Dull), Home Economics Editor for the “Atlanta Journal,” gives the recipe that remained standard in the South for decades thereafter. It is a regional book that very much resembles the many “church” or “ladies’ society” cookbooks of that era. *“Tea: Freshly brewed tea, after three to five minutes’ infusion, is essential if a good quality is desired. The water, as for coffee, should be freshly boiled and poured over the tea for this short time... The tea leaves may be removed when the desired strength is obtained... Tea, when it is to be iced, should be made much stronger, to allow for the ice used in chilling. A medium strength tea is usually liked. A good blend and grade of black tea is most popular for iced tea, while green and black are used for hot... To sweeten tea for an iced drink, less sugar is required if put in while tea is hot, but often too much is made and sweetened, so in the end there is more often a waste than saving... Iced tea should be served with or without lemon, with a sprig of mint, a strawberry, a cherry, a slice of orange, or pineapple. This may be fresh or canned fruit. Milk is not used in iced tea.”*

By **1941**, during **World War II**, the major sources of green tea were cut off from the United States, leaving us with tea almost exclusively from British-controlled India, which produces black tea. Americans came out of the war drinking nearly 99 percent black tea.

Additionally, in **1995**, South Carolina’s grown tea was officially adopted as the Official Hospitality Beverage by State Bill 3487, Act No. 31 of the 111th Session of the South Carolina General Assembly on April 10, 1995.

The history and seriousness of this Southern beverage still holds true today, as in **2003** Georgia State Representative John Noel and four co-sponsors, apparently as an April Fools’ Day joke, introduced House Bill 819, proposing to require all Georgia restaurants that serve tea to serve sweet tea. Representative Noel, is said to have acknowledged that the bill was an attempt to bring humor to the legislature but wouldn’t mind if it became law. The text of the bill proposes:

- (a) *As used in this Code section, the term “sweet tea” means iced tea, which is sweetened with sugar at the time that it is brewed.*
- (b) *Any food service establishment which served iced tea must serve sweet tea. Such an establishment may serve unsweetened tea but in such case must also serve sweet tea.*
- (c) *Any person who violates this Code section shall be guilty of a misdemeanor of a high and aggravated nature.*

As you can clearly see, sweet tea is a staple of South Carolina. As the birthplace of sweet tea and the home to the first tea plants in the United States, this refreshing beverage is deeply rooted into our culture and has spread to other states as well. Whether it is enjoyed from a crystal glass, a mason jar or a Solo cup, sweet tea is a time-honored tradition in the Palmetto State. So, while you’re here, pull up a chair, relax and enjoy a nice cold glass of refreshing sweet tea.

