



Food Safety & Nutrition

Brewing Safe Iced Tea



Sandra Brown
Food Safety and Nutrition Faculty

Iced tea is a favorite beverage especially in the summer months. There are about 37 billion glasses of iced tea served in the U.S. each year.

Brewed correctly one can enjoy a glass of the truly refreshing drink. Brewed tea however is capable of supporting bacterial growth. Tea leaves can become contaminated with bacteria during the growing, harvesting, and drying process. Brewed tea has often been left at room temperature for hours before ice is added or refrigerated before serving. Several years ago, there was an outbreak of foodborne illness related to iced tea and I was one of those that got sick.

Tea should be brewed with water hot enough to kill microorganisms. WSU Cooperative Extension recommends brewing tea with water at 175° F or hotter and then refrigerate it after brewing is completed.

Making “sun tea” by steeping tea bags in containers of water warmed by the sun is a higher risk of bacterial growth because the tea is brewed at low temperatures. Therefore brewing ‘sun tea’ in the northwest is difficult because the days do not get warm enough to heat the water enough to kill the microorganisms.

Hot tea that is cooled rapidly may become cloudy due to tannins released from the steeped tea precipitating out of the solution. One way to avoid cloudiness is to steep tea with hot water - 175° F but not boiling. Then add cool water to the tea concentrate to bring the temperature down gradually before refrigerating or adding ice. (See Basic Iced Tea recipe below for this method)

Other safety tips in making or drinking iced tea include:

- Be sure the pitchers are cleaned between uses.
- Do not store brewed tea at room temperature for more than 8 hours.
- Avoid consuming cloudy iced tea with an off odor.

Tea should be a refreshing beverage for the summer, so be sure you take steps not to make yourself or others ill from your iced tea.

Basic Iced Tea

Makes 1 Gallon Tea

One 1-ounce tea bag (or 4 regular sized tea bags)

1 gallon of water

Place tea bag(s) into a clean sanitized container for each gallon of iced tea desired

Pour one quart of very hot water over teabag(s) and steep for 3-5 minutes.

Remove the tea bag and add 3 quarts of fresh, cold water to yield one gallon of iced tea.

Recipes from Lipton Tea website:

Cape Cod Cooler

Makes 4 (8-oz.) servings

3 cups boiling water

3 Lipton® Glass Size Regular or Naturally Decaffeinated Tea Bags

1/3 cup sugar

1 cup chilled cranberry juice cocktail

1 Tbsp. lemon juice

In teapot, pour boiling water over tea bags; cover and brew 5 minutes. Remove tea bags; stir in sugar and cool. In large pitcher, combine tea with remaining ingredients. Serve with ice. For a “Cold Brew Cape Cod Cooler”, pour 3 cups cool water over 3 Lipton® Cold Brew Blend Glass Size Tea Bags and brew 5 minutes, dunking tea bags occasionally. Remove tea bags and continue as above.

Minty Green Tea Lemonade

Makes 8 servings

4 cups brewed Lipton® Green Tea

1 can (12 oz.) frozen lemonade concentrate

2-1/2 cups water

1/2 cup loosely packed fresh mint leaves

In 2-quart pitcher, combine all ingredients; chill at least 2 hours. Strain, if desired. Serve in ice-filled glasses. Garnish, if desired, with lemon wedges.

For more information about making safe ice teas or other Food safety questions call WSU Extension at 360-397-6060.
