



Get to Steepin'

BY PAUL BROWNE

As we don our scarves and layered looks for L.A.'s refreshing yet short winter, we typically reach for warmer alternatives to our vitamin water and fruit smoothies. In fact, when the body is chilled to the bone, nothing quite hits the spot like a perfectly brewed cup of tea. Tea is the most widely consumed beverage around the globe and has long been considered an effective physiological remedy. When anxious, tea calms. When ill, it soothes. When sluggish, it invigorates. When dispirited, it comforts. When frustrated, it eases. In centuries past, bitter feuds reached peaceful settlements over a steaming cup of tea and today, it can serve as a means to connect with loved ones or establish a joyful rapport with new friends.

Tea drinkers in L.A. are fortunate to have the prominent Tea Garden & Herbal Emporium in their backyard. Offering 105 different types of fine tea and an array of tonic herbs, the Tea Garden's main attraction is Mark Ukra, widely known as Dr. Tea. Since he and his wife, Julie, established the Tea Garden in 1988, Dr. Tea has become the voice and face of the contemporary movement of tea in this country. His philosophy on using the benefits of tea to improve health and maintain an active and positive spirit has landed him his own radio show, a cruise line bearing his name, and a new book, *The Ultimate Tea Diet*, due out in 2008.

To those unfamiliar with the nature of tea, especially in this coffee-centric society, Dr. Tea has all the answers. We know the British like Earl Grey (a mixture of black and oolong teas), South Asians and Middle Easterners primarily drink black, and the Chinese and Japanese prefer green, but what really is the distinction?

"All tea comes from one plant [*C. sinensis*]. The difference is how the tea is produced; the simplest is white and the most difficult is black," explains Dr. Tea. "It doesn't matter which tea you drink. As long as you drink the tea, you'll

Dr. Tea leads the contemporary tea movement in America.

lose weight. As long as you drink the tea, you'll reduce your risk of cancer. Find the tea you love and drink it all day; and get healthier one cup of tea at a time."

The wide variety of fine teas make any visit to the Tea Garden & Herbal Emporium worthwhile, but the heart and soul of the shop comes from its herbal practice. Actually, when the business opened in 1988, it was exclusively herbal and did not introduce tea to their menu until later. Among the thousands of herbs that grow naturally, the Herbal Emporium specializes in tonics. Tonics represent about 25 herbs, which promote optimum health, detoxification and rejuvenation.

"Tonics are super foods. In Asia, tonics are part of the daily diet and have always been prominent in their culinary history," explains master herbalist George Lamoureaux. Such tonic herbs include lyceum berries (goji), boasting superior levels of antioxidants; reishi mushrooms (lingzhi), which is a potent immune modulator; and different types of ginseng used for different purposes. "We have three master herbalists here as well as classically trained acupuncturists and dieticians. It can be hard to know where to start, so we make it very comfortable for people to come in and speak to us to find what will work best for them," says Lamoureaux.

The Tea Garden & Herbal Emporium is located at 9001 Beverly Blvd., West Hollywood. In addition to being a shop for fine teas and Chinese toxin herbs, the Tea Garden operates as a café with a full dining menu for tea aficionados to congregate and exalt in the wonders of the world's most popular drink. Hours of operation: Monday-Thursday 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Friday and Saturday 10 a.m.-9 p.m., Sunday noon-6 p.m. For more information, see www.teagarden.com. All tea-related questions can be sent directly to Dr. Tea at drtea@teagarden.com.