

Tea(s) with Your Honey

an excerpt from from The Healing Powers of Honey: A Complete Guide to Nature's Remarkable Nectar! (Kensington)

For centuries, people all around the world have enjoyed the simple, soothing pleasures of a good cup of tea with a good teaspoon of honey, and nowadays there is more reason to so do. Tea(s)—all kinds--especially with honey, but together they pack a punch of nutritional and health benefits.

Medical doctors, nutritionists, scientists and beekeepers are now confirming what healers have been saying for since biblical times—teas and honeys have a variety of healing powers.

Here are my favorite tea and honey marriages—but there are infinite combinations for both you and me to try. There is no right or wrong combination and what's sweet to you makes honey-tea beverages a sweet sip.

1. Black Tea: The first tea I was introduced to was basic black tea—which does contain caffeine—and I have enjoyed it plain but realized it did need a sweet flavor boost to it. Also, Earl Grey and English breakfast teas (perfect for an Irish breakfast, complete with fried potatoes, scrambled eggs, and scones) are part of the Black Tea group.

Best Honey Matches: Basswood has a distinct flavor that I've used in plain yogurt for a rich flavor and it can give black tea a kick, too. Sourwood boasts a caramel taste that can make a common black tea come to life with taste. Earl Grey teams well with avocado, blueberry, and eucalyptus honeys, too. It's more exotic and exciting than just a simple all-purpose clover honey that comes without pleasant surprises.

2. Green Tea: Touted for its wide array of health virtues, this Asian tea does contain caffeine, like black tea, but not as much. It's an acquired taste and that's where honey comes into play so you can get the best of taste and nutritional benefits.

Best Honey Matches: Blueberry honey has a fruity taste which can give a nice kick to green tea, not the most flavorful tea. Sage honey is mild, a California favorite of mine that brings out the best of green tea.

3. Fruit Tea—Welcome to lemon, orange, rose hips, and apple teas. These fruity teas are sweet and sometimes tart, which call for a honey sidekick.

Best Honey Matches: Mild flavored honeys such as sage and alfalfa brings out the best in fruit teas because it doesn't overpower the fruity taste but maintains the integrity of the fruit flavor.

4. Herbal Tea—Herbal teas come from a variety of plants other than the tea plant. They are made from the leaves, berries, flowers, fruits and bark of herbs and spices.

Although most herbal teas do not contain the antioxidant properties of real tea, they do possess other good-for-you compounds that can enhance your health and well-being. There is a wide range of herbal teas, including ginseng, cinnamon, licorice, and mint.

Rooibos (roy-boss) is the “new” herbal tea on the block—that is often called “Red Tea.” Like green and black teas, this tea contains antioxidants that make it heart-healthy and immune-enhancing—and it's caffeine free.

Best Honey Matches: Teaming earthy and warm herbal teas go well with a mild alfalfa, clover, orange blossom, and sage honeys—common honeys that complement distinct herbal flavors.

5. Oolong Tea—This tea, popular in Asian countries, contains health perks of both black and green teas. A robust flavored-tea that can have a sweet taste lends to different honeys.

Best Honey Matches: Oolong, not a tea familiar to me, was easy to try with a friendly California orange blossom honey with its citrusy sweet taste. Another oolong mate is tupelo honey its light amber color and herbal, fruity flavors.

6. White Tea—And last but not least welcome to this pale tea. Found in China it is believed to rank number one for its antioxidants. It's a bit sweet and mellow. It's the new tea on the block for tea lovers.

Best Honey Matches: Fireweed honey is light colored and smooth, like white tea—the two complement each other. Wildflower, one of my favorite mild honeys also goes nicely with white tea.

As a devout tea drinker, I believe your choice of honey and tea is a personal choice—like pairing dark chocolate with different fruits, herbs and spices. The selection also depends on the season to your mood. But popular and friendly honeys, such as clover and orange blossom are suitable any time, any place because they are not too strong and will not overpower teas—all types—and you can't go wrong for yourself or if you're serving other people.