

Chaa for the Indian Mother's Soul

By: Alpa M.Patel

Many Indians prefer tea to coffee, more specifically Indian masala tea called chaa. It's a cultural thing. As India is a former British colony, a hot cup of tea is important to the Indian way of life. Families in India drink it twice a day - in the morning and at afternoon tea time. When guests arrive, they are offered tea as soon as they walk through the front door and it is not uncommon for young children to drink tea. It's odd to do a recipe column on tea, but chaa has been a substantial part of my life. My mom taught me how to make it when I was young and I would make it whenever guests visited. Although I've gone through many caffeine eschewing phases during my life, it comes to my mind again because when my mom stayed with us after my son was born, I got back into the tea drinking habit. Now, it's become one of my morning rituals to put on a pot of tea while I sleepily play with my son.

Though recipes and styles vary from family to family, making a good Indian masala tea is not difficult at all. The predominant tastes in the tea are cardamom, a staple in Indian cooking, and ginger. A popular Indian tea brand is Red Label although I prefer the easy to find Tetley tea brand. Tea masala (a blend of ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, cloves, peppercorns, and sometimes nutmeg) is found in Indian grocery stores. If you're more industrious than I am and want a truer Indian experience, substitute the tea masala with the core ingredients of fresh ginger, cinnamon sticks, and cardamom powder. Also, use a strong loose-leaf black tea such as Assam rather than tea bags for a fuller flavor.

Ingredients:

- 1/4 tsp tea masala
- 2 Tetley tea bags -British Blend
- 2-3 tsp sugar

Preparation (makes 2 cups of tea):

1. Pour 1 cup water into a stainless steel pot and bring to a boil.
2. When boiling, add 2 tea bags, 1/4 teaspoon tea masala, and 2-3 teaspoons sugar.
3. After about 3-4 minutes, add 1 cup milk. The liquid mix will turn pale beige in color.
4. Bring to a boil again and just as the liquid is rising to the top of the pot, switch off the heat. Pour through strainer and serve hot.

To make your own tea masala:

- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1/4 tsp ground ginger
- 3 cardamoms
- 3 whole cloves
- 2 whole black peppers
- nutmeg, optional

Preparation

1. Crush or grind cinnamon stick, ginger, cardamom pods, cloves, and black peppers in a spice grinder.

