



# TEA HAD MANY SOURCES AND USES

By WAYNE GUTHRIE

The time soon will be ripe for invigorating, refreshing, pungent and aromatic sassafras tea which has such a rich heritage and a loyal following.

It was drunk by old-timers — and even by many of them yet — chiefly as a spring tonic "to purify and thin the blood."

That suggests that in pioneer days, and even earlier, different plant brews were prescribed and concocted for various ailments, both physical and mental.

Many pioneers learned of their uses from the Indians who traditionally combined magic, cookery and medicine to come up with their brews in which they placed great faith. In many areas, especially in backward, backwoods regions, descendants of those same pioneers still use and rely on those same potions.

It should be remembered, however, that even the Indian tribes often did not agree on what brew was best for what.

It does not require much stretch of the memory to recall when country folks made and drank or applied as poultices or salves various homemade remedies. That was when medicines, money and doctors were scarce. Most of them were produced by drinking a "tea" produced by boil-

ing the leaves, bark or root of plants.

Perhaps it was the psychological lift folks got from using them, rather than any curative benefit. Nevertheless, many and varied plant teas were made in localities for aches and pains or other disturbances.

**INDPLS. NEWS**

Many still can remember vividly, for example, when in some localities folks who were afflicted with tuberculosis — then universally called consumption — made and drank a tea produced by boiling wild cherry roots.

In places where such plants were available tonics were brewed from spice bush or prickly ash (twigs or leaves), wormwood seed or yarrow leaves. To many, they tasted too much like bitter medicine. Likewise, in some instances folks felt brews from aspen or willow bark or boneset leaves helped in cases of some kinds of fever.

**MAD 2 1977**

Tonics or teas were made in some localities from red clover leaves, basswood flowers, chamomile leaves or wild ginger roots. Other plants that were employed in various ways included hops, tansy, dried or fresh mint, catnip, peppermint, sage, parsley, pennyroyal, spearmint, horehound, mountain mint or Oswego tea. We are told that some of those still are sug-

gested as "camp teas", that is, for folks young or old, who try to ape the manners and ways of the pioneers or the Indians.

In the beginning the term tea referred to a bracing drink produced by steeping cured oriental tea shrub leaves in hot water. However, in time it was broadened to embrace almost any plant that possessed mildly medicinal or fragrant properties, such as seeds, fruits, flowers, stems, bark, roots or leaves.

When actual tea from England was banned as unpatriotic or was unavailable during our Revolutionary War many substituted the cured leaves of the New Jersey tea, native to that state. By the same token when coffee was scarce and costly in both the North and South during the Civil War, kindred drinks were produced by using such parched substitutes as grains, acorns and the like. Then and even yet the dried roots of the chicory were used.

One account encountered said that in some South American countries, especially Paraguay, the people drink a hot, caffeine and aromatic beverage called mate. It is brewed from the dried leaves of the Paraguay tea, a wild shrub related to our Christmas holly. The brew resembles coffee and tea in its stimulant properties.

*Indiana Native food*

*831.01-3*