

Join Me for a Cooking Class!
Winter-Spring 2008 Schedule

January

18 French Country Cooking

February

1 Italian Country Kitchen
15 French Country Cooking
29 Italian Country Kitchen

March

7 Mediterranean Easter Feast
28 Tapas & Finger Food

April

4 Italian Country Kitchen
18 French Country Cooking
30 Tapas & Finger Food

May

2 Italian Country Kitchen
16 French Country Cooking

June

6 Summer Salads

Join me in the Kitchen & Around the Table for delicious seasonal food & fun
Details & Menus on the Web
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Contact Susan Nye at
susannye@tds.net
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What could be better on a rainy, windy afternoon than a cozy group of friends around a pot of tea? When I was growing up, my Mom and her friends spent many a late afternoon sipping Lipton's and sharing their latest news. Around three o'clock they would start to track each other down to, in their words, "swing a bag". I would hear my Mother on the telephone, proclaiming that she was having a "sinking spell" and needed sustenance and company. Before long, the chairs around the kitchen table were filled. Some days they were light-hearted, sharing gossip and good cheer. Other days they whispered, drawn into some deep and serious conversation. Always curious, I would find some excuse or other to wander through the kitchen, hoping to catch a snippet or two of their mysterious exchange.

Legend has it that tea was discovered by accident more than 5,000 years ago in China when leaves from a nearby bush blew into Emperor Shen Nung's cup of hot water. The Emperor was renowned for his curiosity and rather than toss the brew, gave it a try. He was delighted by both the taste and refreshing lift it gave. From this serendipitous start, tea spread throughout China and eventually around the globe. Today tea is one of the most popular beverages in the world.

Tea may have been discovered in China, but an English grand dame, the Duchess of Bedford is credited with the invention of the afternoon tea party. Before tea was imported into England, most people started their day with a hearty breakfast and did not eat again until evening. Like my Mother, the Duchess suffered a sinking feeling towards the late afternoon. She solved the problem with a reviving cup of tea and a light snack. She invited her friends to join her for small cakes, little sandwiches and, of course, tea. The tea party was born. Other ladies followed the Duchess' lead and afternoon tea parties were soon a favorite forum for entertaining.

Many people confuse these dainty affairs with High Tea. Contrary to popular belief, High Tea had nothing to do with high society or wealthy ladies sipping from bone china. Simply put, working men and women took their High Tea at the high board or supper table. They enjoyed hearty fare to restore their strength after a long, hard day. Low or Afternoon Tea was for ladies and gentlemen of leisure. They gathered in elegant parlors around low tables (we now call them coffee or cocktail tables) filled with the dainty treats.

It did not take long for afternoon tea to go mainstream. Tea gardens were created, not just for Lords and Ladies, but for the general public. Soothing music played while couples flirted and small groups chatted over tea and crumpets. Cold, snow and rain limited the use of tea gardens and gave rise to tea rooms. From cozy little cafés with chintz and lace to elegant spaces in luxury hotels, tea rooms are perfect for a refreshing spot of tea and friendly conversation on a grey afternoon.

The casual get-togethers of my Mother and her friends were a far cry from the Duchess of Bedford's elegant tea parties. There were no silver teapots or bone china. They cheerfully dunked tea bags directly into their cups and even insisted that each bag was good for a second and sometimes a third cup. There were no fancy tea cakes but a few Oreos might have been munched. The friendship they brought to the table was infinitely more important than silver or fancy cakes.

Why not bring your friends together to swing a bag? It is the perfect cure for any sinking spell. Whether you sip your tea in a beautiful garden, in a luxury hotel or around your own kitchen table, refresh yourself with a cup of tea and the camaraderie of good friends.



Bon appétit! - Susan

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Lemon Bars

These are one of my favorite tea-time treats. Give them a try at your next tea party and enjoy!

Makes 24 bars

Shortbread Base

6 ounces (1 1/2 stick) unsalted butter, cut in small pieces
2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup light brown sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt

Lemon Topping

4 large eggs
1 1/2 cup granulated sugar
3/4 cup fresh lemon juice
Grated peel of 1 lemon
1/3 cup all purpose flour
Pinch of salt
3 tablespoons confectioners' sugar

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Lightly butter a 9x13 inch baking pan.
2. Make the shortbread base: In a food processor, process all ingredients until the mixture begins to form small lumps; sprinkle the shortbread base mixture in the bottom of the prepared baking pan. Press evenly into the bottom.
3. Bake the shortbread in the middle of the oven until golden, about 20 minutes.
4. While the shortbread is baking, prepare the topping: In a medium bowl, whisk together the eggs, sugar and salt until well combined. Add the lemon juice, grated lemon peel and flour; whisk to combine.
5. After the shortbread has baked for 20 minutes, remove from the oven and pour the lemon mixture over hot shortbread. Reduce oven temperature to 300°, return the pan to the oven and bake until set, about 30 minutes.
6. Cool completely in the pan and cut into 24 bars. Sift confectioners' sugar over the bars before serving.