

Ohmiseicha Company

140-YEAR MASTERY OF FINE TEA MAKING

Tea aging boxes

Tea in Japan

Tea was first introduced to Japan during the seventh century A.D. by Buddhist monks who returned from their study in China during the T'ang Dynasty. Due to the presence of caffeine in tea and its ability to help stimulate alertness and wakefulness, tea was widely used in Buddhist monasteries as an aid to meditation. During the early part of Japan's Heian Period, Emperor Saga encouraged the cultivation and drinking of tea, aware how it could become a valuable new farming crop and an essential part of court and monastic life. In 1191, Minan Eisai, founder of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism brought powdered green tea from China to Japan. Eisai was the author of an influential two volume treatise on tea (Kissa Yojoki: How to Stay Healthy by Drinking Tea) which led to the idea of tea's potential as a health tonic and also as an aid to spiritual enlightenment.

Emergence of Tea Ceremony Culture

At the beginning of the 14th century, the practice of Tocha (a game based on the identification of different types of tea) became popular among the Samurai class, and from the late 15th to the late 16th century tea gatherings developed into the practice of the modern tea ceremony--Cha-no-yu. The tea ceremony was a transcendent experience instilling a spirit of tranquility and harmony among the participants. The most famous tea master was undoubtedly Sen no Rikyu (1522-1591) who is considered by many to be the true "father of tea." Rikyu had incomparable skills as a tea master and had the ability to see the pure essence of beauty in simple things and to express the ideal of Zen Buddhism in his tea ceremonies. He crafted a new style of tea ceremony, referred to as Wabicha, which gained a strong following among the Samurai class, and is the origin of our modern tea ceremony as practiced today.



Tea growing in the plantation



Ohmiseicha Company "Muso's Esteemed Tea Processor"

Our tea processor, Ohmiseicha Company is located in Tsuchiyama-cho, Koka City -- an area of Japan well-known for the past 400 years as a source of high quality tea. Originally Tsuchiyama tea was considered one of the most highly regarded souvenirs of the Samurai. Many early tea farmers in this region perfected the growing, brewing, and selling of tea in their own tea houses along the Tsuchiyama-Post of this early trade route.

Our supplier, the Ohmiseicha Company, was founded in 1871 as Kusana Kiyogoro Co. As soon as the first tea processing machine was invented, Kusana Kiyogoro purchased one and began their tea production and refining process. In 1926 the company was renamed the Ohmiseicha Company and they continued to both grow tea as well as process and refine it. Now Ohmiseicha only focuses on their refinery process and purchases their raw tea from the best quality tea farmers throughout Japan.



From  Japan



Tea blending table

Japanese Tea Making

Tea leaves start their fermentation process through oxidation immediately after the harvest. The unique skill of the tea makers that supply Ohmiseicha, depends, to a large degree, on their ability to stop the oxidative enzyme activity by using heat from steaming. After the steaming process the tea leaves proceed through a rolling and drying process to further reduce their moisture content. This final dried form of tea is called crude tea or Aracha. This crude tea production is completed at the tea farmers' facilities. This crude tea has been thoroughly dried but nothing else has been added or done to the tea before being selected by the Ohmiseicha purveyors.

140-year mastery of fine tea making at Ohmiseicha Company

The 140-year old Ohmiseicha Company employs two Japanese certified tea appraisers (out of only 39 certified tea appraisers in all of Japan). These tea appraisers supervise the purchasing of the crude tea and are partly responsible for the mastery of fine tea making by the Ohmiseicha Company. One of the most important skills of Ohmiseicha's tea making comes from selecting the highest quality crude teas. Selecting the best quality crude tea involves sensory tasting, chemical analysis, and reviewing the cultivation records of the tea plants. Assessing the real quality of crude tea requires continuous efforts to hone the tea selector's sensory skills. At the same time, trust relationships with tea farmers are also important as the old saying goes: "Look at a person when buying tea."

Another highly refined skill required for mastering high quality tea is the blending technique. It is essential to select teas with recognized unique flavor and aroma profiles for the blending stage. It is important to maximize the full potential of each individual tea when blending them to achieve a rich and flavorful tea (that cannot be accomplished with just single origin teas). After roasting the crude tea, Ohmiseicha craftsmen blend these crude teas into their final tea products. This skill requires experience, insight, and intuition from the tea maker. The tea makers are also required to perfect the skill of continuous tastings. In addition, tea appraisers are required to discern the big picture of tailoring a delicious final product from the initial purchase of crude teas through a deep understanding of the quality, balance, and nuanced characteristics of the crude teas.

Health Benefits of Tea

Green tea is quite beneficial to our health. The basic components and nutrients in green tea have a wide range of beneficial effects:

Catechins:

Catechins are a type of polyphenol and are responsible for the astringency in green tea. Commonly known as tannins, the astringent component in tea provides many benefits, such as decreasing blood cholesterol, body fat reduction, antioxidant effect, tooth decay prevention, antibacterial effect.

Catechins are compounds with high antioxidant activity. These compounds offer protection against many kinds of cancer, help prevent cardiovascular disease and slow the aging process. They also reduce harmful cholesterol in the blood, stabilize blood sugar levels, help reduce high blood pressure and enhance the resistance of the body to many toxins.

Caffeine:

Caffeine is the bitter flavor in tea. The main effects of caffeine include increased alertness and a mild diuretic effect. Since caffeine has a stimulant effect on the central nervous system, it can ward off drowsiness and increase the capacity for mental or physical labor.

Theanine and Vitamins:

Theanine is a component that brings full-bodied flavor, Umami, to tea and it also has a relaxing effect. Green tea, is rich in vitamins C, B2, E, folic acid, and β -carotene, all of which are beneficial to your health.



Testing the unique flavors of our tea.