

Afternoon Tea is a splendid way

to celebrate and socialize, have a bite to eat, good conversation and share actual physical face time, be it with your "special valentine", on Mother's Day,



Graduation, Holidays, or just so - by our fireplace, in the loft or in the garden in Spring. During the current "stay at home" pandemic times, you can even pick up a beautifully assembled box of tea time to go, sandwiches, scones and sweets carefully wrapped up, including clotted cream and jam, and a selection of teas for you to brew at home. Just pick up from Beans in the Belfry, set your own table with your fine linen and china, put the kettle on, scald your tea pot, brew and let the tea steep. That's it. You and your guest(s) will spend an enjoyable time and make memories.

At Beans in the Belfry we started to serve Afternoon Tea right from the beginning in 2004. Melanie, our proprietor, had spent some time in London during her high school years and become familiar with this very comfortable and tasty 'meal'. Her mother, Hanna, lived in



Oxford, England for several years and had gone for Tea Service at the local Randolph Hotel many a Saturday afternoon, to the annoyance of the lobby waiter there who looked down upon the foreign au-pair girls trying to experience British

culture. "In order to stretch our tea time", Hanna recounts, "we would ask for more hot water for the tea pot and he grudgingly complied".

So, what should you expect when gathering for this delightful traditional British afternoon interlude? Of course a properly brewed pot of tea to begin with. Choose from all types of tea: black, white, green, red, oolong, herbal, fruited, floral and blended, the most traditional being a robust loose leaf black tea such as Organic Breakfast, Earl Grey or Orange Pekoe. Cream is

never used. Use only milk and lump sugar. It is important to note that the milk and sugar go into the cup after the tea, never before. Stir your tea without allowing the spoon to strike the side of the cup. When using lemon, be sure to introduce it after the sugar has settled.

It was Portuguese and Dutch traders who first imported tea to Europe, with regular shipments by 1610. England actually was a latecomer to the tea trade, as the East India Company did not capitalize on tea's popularity until the mid-18th



century. In the early 1800's ships carrying tea from the Far East to Britain could take over a year to bring home their precious cargo. Then, the first clippers came on the scene. Their sleek design and tall masts' full sail allowed them to speed along at 18 knots, nearly as fast as a modern ocean liner. The most famous was the Cutty Sark, built in 1868.

Once you are comfortable with your tea selection, on comes a three-tiered stand with the goodies: three sorts of very thin tea sandwiches, usually tomato and chives, minted cucumber and a delightful ginger carrot cream cheese spread. It could also be egg or chicken salad, or watercress of the utmost delicate flavor. Presented on a bed of lettuce leaves to keep them moist,



they are garnished with parsley sprigs, chives flowers, or blooming rosemary twigs. One starts with the savory food and always sipping from your tea cup in between bites, and sharing bits of news with your tea companions, it's quite a filling "meal".

Just about then you think you might fancy a little sweetness after the savory, and on comes the plate of fragrant freshly baked scones, served with a bowl of clotted cream and two kinds of jam. Depending on what's available, you can have cranberry, blueberry, apricot, poppy seed or ginger-orange scones. There are two scones for each guest, so you can enjoy different flavors. The most "approved" way to eat a scone is to break off a little bitesize piece, apply the clotted cream and jam to each individual piece just as it is to be eaten. Remember, preserves go first, then follow with a dab of the cream.

By now, you are no longer hungry but the sweets are beckoning, and they are such dainty morsels, like Scottish short bread, cream puffs, pastel meringues, a tiny square of chocolate cake, or fresh strawberries dipped in sugar. Depending on the season, you might find rose pedals, little field violets, or pea blossoms on your sweets plate. If you feel totally sated



now, dare for more and ask for a floral or fruited tea to go with your sweets. A white orchard or caramel and pear blend will satisfy the ultimate wish for the perfect pairing.

Our vintage tea china comes from the four corners of the world. Turn over your plates and you will find inscriptions such as Royal Ironstone made in England, or a famous Wedgwood piece, a



blue patterned cup made in Bavaria, or saucers from Italy, plates from Japan. The heritage silver spoons might have a family crest or some secretive looking numbers stamped on them. Some table linen and napkins are hand embroidered, who knows what glamorous or ceremonial times they have witnessed before arriving at Beans in the Belfry.

Each tea pot has its own character, tall and slender, alabaster white, thick and pouchy, ornate with curly swirls, jolly pink or blue. They all want to be ‘tipped over and poured out’. Each contributes to a lively tradition of taking tea in the library or drawing room.

Afternoon tea is gaining popularity among Americans, many of whom adopt the European tea service format. But never call it High Tea, that was actually the evening meal of the working class during the industrial revolution.



Take afternoon tea as a light leisurely repast or in place of the business executive lunch. Statistics show that tea has become the world’s most popular beverage, consumed around the globe in amounts second only to water.

At Beans in the Belfry everything is prepared to order, therefore it is important that you call ahead at least 24 hours or better a week to make a reservation. Your carefully decked table will be waiting for you.

