

TEA BUDS; CHRISTMAS TEA

MISTLETOE

Mistletoe is a parasitic plant. It grows on trees sending its roots to penetrate the tree and take up nutrients. The type of mistletoe used at Christmas time is native to North America and grows on trees in the west and in a line from New Jersey to Florida. The European mistletoe is a shrub with yellow flowers and white berries.

From earliest times in Europe, the mistletoe has been one of the most magical, mysterious, and sacred plants of folklore. It was considered to bestow life and fertility and was a protection against poison. Mistletoe was gathered at the mid-summer and winter solstice and used to decorate homes to bring prosperity to the home owner. Mistletoe was hung from rafters to ward off evil spirits and were placed over house and stable doors to keep out witches. Many of these traditions were transferred to our American plant by early settlers.

Greeks believed that the mistletoe had the power to bestow fertility and the Scandinavians considered it a plant of peace under which enemies could declare truce or fighting spouses could kiss and make-up. At Christmas time a young lady standing under a ball of mistletoe cannot refuse to be kissed. Such a kiss could mean deep romance or lasting friendship. If

the girl remained unknissed she cannot expect to marry the following year.

The Legend :

For its supposedly mystical power mistletoe has long been at the center of many folklore. One is associated with the Goddess Frigga. The story goes that Mistletoe was the sacred plant of Frigga, goddess of love and the mother of Balder, the god of the summer sun. Balder had a dream of death which greatly alarmed his mother, for should he die, all life on earth would end. In an attempt to keep this from happening, Frigga went at once to air, fire, water, earth, and every animal and plant seeking a promise that no harm would come to her son. Balder now could not be hurt by anything on earth or under the earth. But Balder had one enemy, Loki, god of evil and he knew of one plant that Frigga had overlooked in her quest to keep her son safe. It grew neither on the earth nor under the earth, but on apple and oak trees. It was lowly mistletoe. So Loki made an arrow tip of the mistletoe, gave to the blind god of winter, Hoder, who shot it, striking Balder dead. The sky paled and all things in earth and heaven wept for the sun god. For three days each element tried to bring Balder back to life. He was finally restored by Frigga, the goddess and his mother. It is said the tears she shed for her son turned into the pearly white berries on the mistletoe plant and in her joy Frigga kissed everyone who passed beneath the tree on which it grew. The story ends with a decree that who should ever stand under the humble mistletoe, no harm should befall them, only a kiss, a token of love.

What could be more natural than to translate the spirit of this old myth into a Christian way of thinking and accept the mistletoe as the emblem of that Love which conquers Death? Its medicinal properties, whether real or imaginary, make it a just emblematic of that Tree of Life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations thus paralleling it to the Virgin Birth of Christ.

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ALL ABOUT THE CHRISTMAS TREE

In ancient times, many people believed the sun was actually a god. The cold and snow appeared (winter) because the god was sick and weak. When the winter solstice arrived, the people celebrated because they knew the sun was getting well and would soon be strong enough again to bring the warmth and the return of green plants and life to the fields and forests. The people hung evergreen boughs to remind themselves how the sun would soon return the green plants.

Ancient Egyptians worshipped the sun god Ra and at solstice would decorate their homes with green palm rushes as a symbol of life over death.

The early Romans celebrated Saturnalia at solstice and decorated their homes with evergreen boughs as a symbol of renewed life. The Druids, the Celts, and the ancient Vikings believed the evergreen was a special plant of the sun god, Balder.

The Germans started the Christmas tree tradition as we know it today when 16th century Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. It is believed that Martin Luther, walking home on a winter's night, was awed by the beauty of stars shining through the evergreen boughs. To recapture this scene

for his family, he chopped down a tree and erected it in the main room of their home and wired candles to the branches.

Most Americans in the 1800s found Christmas trees and oddity. The first record of one being displayed happened in 1830 by a German settler in PA. German settlers had trees in their homes as early as 1747 but as late as the 1840s Christmas trees were seen as pagan symbols and not accepted by most Americans.

Christmas itself was viewed as sacred by New England Puritans and they tried to stamp out any frivolity at this time such as decorated trees and Christmas carols.

Thankfully, in 1846, a beloved queen of England, Queen Victoria, had a picture published depicting herself and her family gathered around a Christmas tree. Whatever Victoria did became fashionable, not only in England but, in the new US as well. The Christmas tree had arrived! By 1890, ornaments were being imported from Germany.

Purchases for real Christmas trees in the US in 2014 was 33,000,000 trees at a cost of \$1,225,000,000.00 . It takes seven years to grow a tree for cutting. (Fake trees purchased in 2014 numbered 9,500,000.)

The famous tree in Rockefeller Center, first displayed in 1931, is today adorned with over 25,000 lights.

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The Christmas tea table is set with a white table cloth and red linens. Of course, any combination of holiday colors would be good. Continuing with the white scheme, a red lace or holiday printed table runner looks wonderful. Place a pedestal in the center (this could be an upside down flower pot or plastic bucket), cover it with some red or holiday print fabric, and use it to display a miniature Christmas tree with tiny ornaments. Around the tree place miniature Santas. Set out the tea cups and saucers, sugar bowl and tongs, holiday napkins, and small red plates. Using solid colors for the plates and napkins eliminates color confusion and makes the tree and Santas stand out more clearly. (All of the decorative items were purchased at the second-hand store very inexpensively!)

The menu might include a special brewed Christmas tea or a tea bag tea of apple-cinnamon or orange cinnamon spice. Morsels might include a wide range of sweet treats but since they are overly abundant this time of year, you might opt for grilled cheese fingers. Simply make grilled cheese sandwiches and slice them into long narrow fingers. They are fun to eat and simple home cooking after all the holiday goodies. Choose a good flavorful cheese or two like Marble Jack, Medium cheddar, or white bacon cheddar. Serve them with a good kosher dill pickle spear.

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Making Christmas tea;

Place 12 cups of water in a large saucepan or Dutch oven.

Gather the following;

2 cinnamon sticks

6 to 12 whole Allspice

1 teaspoon whole cloves

Place them in a cheesecloth bag or simply put them in the saucepan and use a slotted spoon to remove them when necessary.

Bring the water to a boil. Remove from heat. Add the tea bags (any good black tea), cover and let steep for five minutes. Remove tea bags and spices.

Add 1 cup packed brown sugar and stir to dissolve

1 cup cranberry juice

½ cup orange juice

¼ cup lemon juice

Serve warm. (makes 3 quarts)