

**Dear Party Guru:** I'd like to host a bridal shower that's intimate, elegant and, of course, vegan! Any ideas?

**The Guru Responds:** I have a confession to make that may result in my expulsion from American culture. I have never had a cup of coffee. Ever. I have been a tea drinker all my life, and my interest in tea borders on obsession. Preparing tea for guests is a ritual that spans thousands of years all around the globe, and I can't think of a better way to honor your friend's impending marriage than to create a celebration centered around this healthful ancient beverage.

### **Relaxing Ritual**

Weave into your celebration the four principles of the centuries-old Japanese Tea Ceremony: harmony (between humans and nature), respect (for others), purity (of mind and heart), and tranquility. Carefully choose the flowers, vase, and tea wares for the event; light a fire; and make a point to be thoroughly present as you enjoy the company of each of your guests.

**Suggested Menu:** My favorite Japanese teas are Kukicha, Genmaicha, and Hojicha, any of which would complement sushi rolls, miso soup, edamame, rice crackers, and wasabi peas.

### **Elemental Entertaining**

In Chinese culture, tea is regarded as one of the "seven daily necessities," and drinking tea reflects our harmony with nature. Incorporate the Five Elements of Chinese philosophy into your fête by including wood (plant a tree together), earth (use clay pots), fire (light candles), metal (hang windchimes), and water (treat everyone to their own foot-soaking tub).

**Suggested Menu:** Serve Chinese teas (my faves include Dragon Well, Silver Needle, and Jasmine) with potstickers, spring rolls, scallion pancakes, and a tofu stir-fry.

### **Sophisticated Soiree**

Iron your doilies and break out your tea cozies to create a traditional British Afternoon Tea. Adorn your table with porcelain, silver, and linens, and provide a tray full of non-dairy milk, sugar cubes, jam, and lemon slices. Provide soft music, and prepare to giggle like girls. Hats and gloves are optional.

**Suggested Menu:** English Breakfast, Orange Pekoe, and Darjeeling teas are all customary, along with sandwiches, scones, cakes, and pastries.

Visit [compassionatecooks.com](http://compassionatecooks.com) for tea-themed recipes.

### **Tea Temperatures**

\*Black Tea: Boil water to 212° F and steep for 3-5 minutes.

\*Oolong Tea: Water should be 200° F. Steep for 4 minutes.

\*Green Tea: Ideal water temp is 185 F°. Steep for 2-3 minutes.

\*White tea: 175°F is perfect. Steep for 1-2 minutes.

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