

Tea Party

People all over the world have been enjoying tea for well over 3,000 years, and formal British-style tea parties have been taking place since at least the 1600's! So, sit down, pour yourself a cup of tea, and let's chat about tea parties (this document pertains to British-style parties.)



Choose your time.

Traditionally, a tea party is held anytime in the afternoon, either late noon (11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.) or afternoon (3:00 to 4:00 p.m.). Anytime is good for a tea party! A small family tea party is even okay late at night after dinner.



Invite your guests.

You can send handwritten invitations 2 weeks in advance, or simply call them on the phone or send an email to your guests. Try to keep the guest list to around 8 people. Tea parties are supposed to be cozy, so the tea party host can easily mingle with each of special guest, so only invite your closest friends or relatives.



Obtain tea party supplies.

You will definitely need a tea pot, cups and saucers in order to serve tea to each of your guests. Buy a tea strainer and use a small dish to collect used tea leaves. You can also serve a pitcher of milk, lemon slices, honey and sugar. Make sure you have enough small plates, napkins and utensils if you are serving food.



Buy tea.

There are many different kinds of tea that you can serve, but don't feel like you have to serve more than 2 or 3 varieties. Some varieties include black tea, white tea, green tea, oolong tea, and blended teas.



Serve some food.

Look up some tea sandwich, scone and pastry recipes online or in your favorite recipe book. You might want to serve something light, like cucumber sandwiches, but you also want to serve something sweet, like cranberry scones or fruitcake. Tea party food tends to be more sweet than savory, so follow that rule in order to be the perfect tea party host.

Set the tea table.

Cover a large table with a white linen tablecloth. Place the tea at one end of the table and make sure to leave plenty of room for yourself. As the host, you will be serving the guests their tea. Place the lemon, milk, honey and sugar next to the tea, and the rest of the food at the other end of the table.



Dress the part.

Wear nice clothing, similar to what you might wear to church or a casual wedding. Tea parties are casual affairs but don't be afraid to get a bit dressier than you would for a normal gathering with friends.



Get ready to serve tea!

Begin boiling the water and setting out the food about 10 minutes before guests are scheduled to arrive. Take this time to put the tea inside the tea pot. You may use this time while the water is boiling to chat.

When the kettle is whistling, pour the water into the tea pot and take the tea pot to the table. Bring guests to the table and chat, sip tea and eat the delicious food you've prepared.

Tea Etiquette

Holding a Teacup

- For one not to spill the hot liquid onto oneself, the proper way to hold the vessel of a cup with no handle is to place one's thumb at the 6 o'clock position and one's index and middle fingers at the 12 o'clock position, while gently raising one's pinkie up for balance.
- Tea cups with a handle are held by placing one's fingers to the front and back of the handle with one's pinkie up again allowing balance.
- Never wave or hold your tea cup in the air. When not in use, place the tea cup back in the tea saucer.
- If you are at a buffet tea, hold the tea saucer in your lap with your left hand and hold the tea cup in your right hand. When not in use, place the tea cup back in the tea saucer and hold it in your lap. The only time a saucer is raised together with the teacup is when one is at a standing reception.

Pinkies Up

- Originally, all porcelain teacups were made in China, starting around 620 A.D. These small cups had no handles. For one not to spill the hot liquid onto oneself, the proper way to hold the vessel was to place one's thumb at the 6 o'clock position and one's index and middle fingers at the 12 o'clock position, while gently raising one's pinkie up for balance.
- Pinkie up doesn't mean straight up in the air, but slightly tilted. It is not an affectation, but a graceful way to avoid spills. Never loop your fingers through the handle, nor grasp the vessel bowl with the palm of your hand.



Serving Tea

- Milk is served with tea, not cream. Cream is too heavy and masks the taste of the tea. Although some pour their milk in the cup first, it is probably better to pour the milk in the tea after it is in the cup in order to get the correct amount.
- Remove the tea bag from the cup and place it on a side saucer or in a slop bowl. Do not use the string to wrap around or squeeze the tea bag.
- When serving lemon with tea, lemon slices are preferable, not wedges. Either provide a small fork or lemon fork for your guests, or have the tea server can neatly place a slice in the tea cup after the tea has been poured. Be sure never to add lemon with milk since the lemon's citric acid will cause the proteins in the milk to curdle.



Using Teaspoons

- Do not stir your tea, with your teaspoon, in sweeping circular motions.
- Place your tea spoon at the 6 o'clock position and softly fold the liquid towards the 12 o'clock position two or three times.
- Either place the iced teaspoon on the side of another plate or ask the server or hostess to remove the spoon from the table. Never leave the spoon in the glass especially when actually drinking your tea.

Drinking Tea

- Do not use your tea to wash down food. Sip, don't slurp, your tea and swallow before eating.



How to Fold a Napkin for a Table Setting

- Start with a clean square cloth napkin for the best folding results. Paper napkins will also work with many of these folds.
- Think about the mood your folded napkin can help to set. A floral fold can give a springtime vibe, while a standing pyramid can provide extra elegance.
- Look for video tutorials on our YouTube playlist.

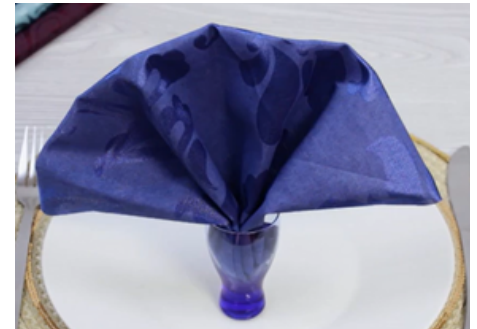
Rectangle Fold - Easy but classy.

1. Fold the top half of a square napkin down to completely cover the bottom half. This makes a rectangle.
2. Fold the left half of the napkin over to cover the right half. Now you have a square again.
3. Fold the right half of the napkin over to cover the left half. This little rectangle is your finished product!
4. Set the napkin on the plate (or to the left of the plate) with the fold facing to the right. If you want to set the napkin on the right side of the plate, turn the napkin so the fold is facing the plate.



Goblet Fan - Popular choice for fancy and casual dinners.

1. Fold the top half of a square napkin down to completely cover the bottom half. This makes a rectangle.
2. Pleat the napkin like an accordion, working from left to right. Fold over about 1 inch of the napkin from the left edge, then fold the next 1 inch under the napkin, and so on all the way across.
3. Slide one end of the napkin into a wine or water glass and fan it out at the top. Keep the napkin scrunched together and slide it into the top of the glass. Make minor adjustments by hand to make it look like the napkin is flowering out the top of the goblet.



Silverware Roll - Practical and common in restaurants.

1. Fold the top left corner of a square napkin down to the bottom right corner, creating a right triangle.
2. Rotate the triangle so that the longest side is at the bottom. Lay the silverware on the center bottom of the napkin, running parallel to the longest side of the triangle.
3. Fold in the left and then right corners of the triangle so that they cover the silverware.
4. Starting at the bottom, tightly roll up the napkin all the way to the pointed top, neatly securing the silverware inside.



Silverware Pouch - Easy to do and very functional.

1. Fold the top half of a square napkin down to completely cover the bottom half. This makes a rectangle.
2. Flip the napkin over so the “open” corner (where you can separate the layers of fabric) is at the top left.
3. Fold the top layer of fabric down from the left corner to the right corner.
4. Flip the napkin over again so the open corner is at the top right.
5. Fold 1/3 of the fabric on the right edge over to the middle of the napkin.
6. Bring the left 1/3 over the center so the folded sides overlap. You’ll now have a thin, vertically-oriented rectangle.
7. Flip the napkin over and insert your silverware into the pouch. The opening of the pouch will be a diagonal slit in the middle of the rectangle.



Bow Tie

1. Fold over the top and bottom parts of a square napkin so that they meet in the middle. You’ll end up with a rectangle with a horizontal line running across its middle.
2. Fold in the left and right sides so they meet in the middle, creating a smaller square.
3. Flip the napkin over. Use your thumb and first two fingers to pinch together the napkin from the top and bottom. You’ll see the bow tie (or butterfly) shape now!
4. Secure the middle with a napkin ring or a strip of fabric. Slip the napkin ring over one side of the napkin and into the middle. Or, wrap a strip of fabric around the pinched-together area and tack it in place with a small dab of hot glue.



Formal Pyramid - Classy and Traditional

1. Grab the top left corner of a square napkin and fold it down to the bottom right corner. You’ll have a triangle with a 90-degree angle at the bottom right.
2. Rotate the napkin so the longest side of the triangle (opposite the right angle) is at the top, running horizontally.
3. Fold the right-side corner of the triangle down to meet the bottom corner.
4. Bring the left corner down the same way to make a diamond shape. There will be a vertical slit in the middle of the diamond.
5. Flip the napkin over and fold the top corner down to meet the bottom corner. You’ll now have a triangle once again!
6. Fold the right-side corner over to meet the left side corner. Now you’ll have a small right triangle with the 90-degree angle at the top right.
7. Stand the napkin up like a tent and place it on a plate. Set the longest side of the triangle down on the plate and gently fluff out the sides of the triangle to create a slight pyramid shape.

