

the daily dish

Wednesday, December 7, 2005

Teatime Taste Test

Dateline: Four Times Square, NY, NY

Although one of the best books to come out this year, *How to Be Idle*, rails against the bagged tea phenomenon as the enemy of leisurely contemplative teatime traditions, like most people nowadays, the tea drinkers here at Epicurious (including our resident Brits and Anglophiles) have forsaken loose tea for the convenient bag-in-a-mug route. So, we were intrigued to try the new teas from Adagio, a Clifton, New Jersey-based company that promises that its pyramid-shaped mesh bags, which are designed to allow the tea leaves to open and release their flavors, deliver "the taste of loose tea and the convenience of a disposable bag." We held a blind tasting, pitting one of Adagio's bagged black teas, the Golden Yunnan, against bagged tea from two other commercial blends, one British and one Irish. Here are our results.

Without milk, the Adagio tea was the only really drinkable blend. It was robust, smoky, a little earthy, and had a deep brown color. Both the Irish and British teas were lighter in color; the Irish one was rather bitter without milk, while the English one tasted thin. Those two improved vastly with the addition of milk, but the Adagio tea still came out on top. The majority of the tasters liked its pronounced, complex flavor and roundness. Epicurious's editor-in-chief, Tanya Steel (a Brit), who regularly downs cups and cups of Tetley's British Blend, said the Adagio tea was rich enough to stop at one cup. Meanwhile, our contributor Joanne Camas (who grew up in Scotland) remarked, "You wouldn't need a cookie with it."

However, Adagio was not the unanimous winner. At least one staffer found it too strong and floral, while another said it seemed like a gourmet "special occasion" tea rather than something she'd drink every day. And for sipping with cookies, we all remain stubbornly loyal to our favorite brews, including Yorkshire Gold, PG Tips, Typhoo, and Barry's Irish Tea.

Loose and bagged Adagio teas are available from www.adagio.com. Tea and Sympathy (www.teaandsympathynewyork.com) sells many brands and varieties of tea, both loose and bagged.

— The Editors

*Hot stuff coming through: For a primer on one of the world's most popular drinks, see our feature **Time for Tea**. And check out our **Holiday Gift Guide** for a stylish stainless-steel kettle and 24 other excellent presents.*

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