

In Praise of Hot Toddies

By Carol Harvie Yamaguchi

During Vancouver's blustery damp winter, nothing warms the intrepid diner like a hot toddy. Medicinal, relaxing, comforting, and delicious, a hot toddy is really any drink that is warm, sweet, and alcoholic. Many cultures around the world have their own traditional hot drinks which over the centuries have been used to cure hangovers, stomach disorders, colds, chills, or as celebratory beverages during the cold weather months.

The classic **Hot Toddy** is traditionally brandy, rum or whiskey, hot water, lemon juice, and honey. A **Hot Buttered Rum** is a delicious variation that uses dark rum flavoured with a pat of butter, maple syrup, nutmeg, cloves, lemon peel, a cinnamon stick and hot water. In Japan there is a hot beverage served at New Year's Eve called **Toso** which is a herbal medicinal mixture steeped in warm sake that originated in China hundreds of years ago.

Egg nog is perhaps the most famous of the hot milk and egg drinks and has existed for centuries. A carved wooden mug – called a noggin – was used to serve a comforting mixture of egg, sugar, vanilla, mixed spice, milk, and sherry or brandy. This curative winter drink began in the English taverns and was brought over by the settlers to the New World where it was then adapted with rum; it has been a traditional beverage during the Christmas season ever since. An older version of this drink was a **Posset**, which was a milky alcoholic drink, popular during the middle ages. A Scottish posset contained warm milk, oatmeal, honey, nutmeg, and a generous shot of whiskey. In Japan, a good cure-all for colds and other illness, is a warm drink made from beaten eggs and sake.

Mulled wine (mulled means heated and spiced) can be found in many of the northern European countries and is basically red wine that is slowly heated with various herbs, fruit, spices and sugar. **Glogg** is popular in Scandinavia especially during Advent and Christmas; it usually has brandy, port wine, vodka or aquavit added for extra punch and is served in mugs with raisins and almonds. The German version is known as **Gluhwein** and is very similar with perhaps the addition of schnapps. **Wassail** (“ves heill” meaning “good health” in Norse) originated in old England and consisted of heated wine or ale, heavily spiced and sweetened. A Saxon version of this mulled wine added eggs and milk for variation and was served in a wooden punch bowl which was then carried from house to house to celebrate the new year with neighbors. Mulled drinks can also include **Hot Spiced Cider** with consists of apple cider, cloves, allspice berries, sugar, salt and spiced rum. Another version of mulled cider adds lemon peel and a splash of angostura bitters.

The most popular alcoholic coffee drink in North America is probably the legendary **Irish Coffee**. Purists agree that the whiskey must be a premium blend, and the coffee must be freshly made and piping hot, sweetened with a sugar syrup, and topped with an unsweetened whipped cream that pours thickly but not stiffly. When Irish coffee is made like this, there is a heavenly contrast in textures and flavors, and the result is delicious.

Many cultural variations can be created from this classic drink: Italian Coffee could contain Amaretto or Sambuco; add some schnapps to make German Coffee or some Tequila or Kahlua for Mexican Coffee. Swedish Coffee contains strong black coffee, aquavit and sugar but has no whipped cream. Endless possibilities are also available using black tea. Although **Blueberry Tea** is a popular winter beverage using Amaretto and Grand Marnier, it could also be adapted to suit the mood or the cuisine. **Canelazo** is a traditional hot toddy from the Andes that consists of cinnamon tea spiked with sugar and aguardiente, a fermented sugar cane juice nicknamed fire water.

After an invigorating day on the slopes or a damp and chilly afternoon on the soccer field, nothing warms and relaxes someone with frostbitten toes and fingers, than a hot toddy. When this warm alcoholic concoction is adapted with global ingredients to suit the multicultural population in Vancouver, the possibilities become exotic and infinite. Restaurants and bars might notice a significant increase in winter liquor sales if a more ethnic selection of hot drinks were offered.

Christmas Tea

(Recipe from Tea Association of Canada)

1 1/3 c water

6 tea bags

1 cinnamon stick

3 cloves

1/3 c sugar

1 1/3 c. cranberry juice

1 c. dry red wine

orange/pear/apple slices (studded with cloves)

Bring water to the boil. Add tea and spices. Cover and steep.

Remove tea bags and stir in sugar, juice and wine.

Heat but do not boil.