

In India it is the practice to lift the plant with a clod of earth, before it is carefully transplanted to a new clearing, but in Ceylon and Java, on the other hand, the plants are often transplanted devoid of any clod.

It is most essential that the ground be kept free of weeds.

The Tea bushes require particular attention when they are young for weak or undernourished bushes are always susceptible to blights. Blister Blight for instance, is a matter of grave concern in India, Ceylon and Indonesia. This fungus affects the young leaves.

Probably the most serious insect menace is the *Helopeltis*—the "Tea mosquito"—which feeds on the sap of the young leaves. However, D.D.T. used as a spray or dust, kills the insects, and keeps the bushes immune for a period after treatment.

The leaves from which Tea is made, grow on bushes, which are periodically pruned to a height of about three feet, and in this way the energy of the bush is concentrated in producing more and finer leaves.

The leaves, which are green and tender, are plucked every ten days or so by experienced workers, who, although they sometimes pluck as much as 60 lb. of green leaf a day, have to examine every shoot before selecting it. Plucking is an expert job, great care being needed to ensure that no stalk or coarse material reaches the factory. Incidentally, it requires about four pounds of leaf to provide one pound of the finished article.

Usually the leaf is not ready for plucking until the bush is about five years old.

When the leaves reach the factory they are spread thinly on long canvas shelves and allowed to dry for 24 hours . . . hot air generally being used to aid this drying process.

This process alone reduces the weight of the leaves by half.

After drying, the leaves are put into rollers, which break up the leaf cells and allow the juices to escape. It is during this process that Tea is given its peculiar well-known twist.

From the rolling room, the Tea . . . still more or less green . . . goes on to the fermenting room, where it is thinly spread on cement, glass, or tile tables.

During the fermentation of the Tea-leaf, oxidation brings about chemical changes, which largely determine the flavour and strength, and also the colour of the infused leaves.

The leaf is allowed to ferment until it is a bright coppery red colour.

After fermentation, the Tea leaves must be dried again . . . this time in a furnace somewhat similar to a baker's oven. This process, which is called firing, requires very careful attention, particularly because Tea has to be fired at specified temperatures.

The leaves are next sifted into various sizes, the romantic names of which are more or less familiar to us. Some of these are called Orange Pekoe, Broken Pekoe, and Broken-Orange Pekoe.

These names have nothing to do with the quality of the Tea but merely indicate the size of the leaf after it has gone through all the processes.

The final process in the Tea factory is packing the Tea . . . according to its grade . . . into special lead-lined chests to keep it fresh and fragrant while being shipped to Australia and other parts of the world.

All Tea is tasted and graded by men called Tea tasters, who are responsible for ensuring that we get suitable blends. Tea tasting is an art that requires many years of experience, as the taster has to have a very keen palate. When tasting Tea, only a spoonful is taken into the mouth by drawing it with a quick inward breath between the lips. The liquid is kept in continuous contact with the palate by rolling it around in the mouth. It is never swallowed. The object of tasting is to learn the true quality of the Tea, with a view to utilising it either outright, or in a blend.

From the factory, Tea commences the first stage of its romantic journey . . . being piled high in quaint ox waggons, motor lorries, or barges according to the part of the country in which it is produced, and then conveyed to the nearest railway or seaport. Then it is on its way to the various nations of the world.

Black or Green Tea

Either black or green Tea may be prepared from the same leaves, gathered at the same time, under the same circumstances; the difference lies in the



"Down the River" is the title of this black and white sketch sent in by 17 years old Betty Lee of the Cootamundra Girls Home