

We've gone TEA-TOTAL!

The nation's favourite drink is now being grown at home – meet the UK's tea champions

We Brits do love our tea, and while China, India, Sri Lanka and Kenya still account for 75% of tea grown worldwide, there are some delicious new teas being created right here, in Britain.

The Tregothnan estate in Cornwall produced our first home-grown tea in 2005, and tea is now being grown in Wales and Scotland too. Surprised? Well, the tea plant *Camellia sinensis* can cope with UK conditions, given an acidic, well-drained soil with plenty of rain.

'Our Welsh tea has hints of fruit'



The Welsh weather can make growing tea hard



Lucy George, 39, runs the Peterston Tea Estate, near Cardiff, the first tea garden in Wales.

In 2014, I was looking to diversify the family fruit farm, so our income wasn't quite so seasonal. I googled tea, found it was already being grown in Cornwall, and decided it was the answer.

The weather here can be brutal, and at times we've lost a lot of plants, which is hard, financially and mentally. Picking the tea, between late March and late September, is back-breaking work. But we've come so far, and we have learned so much.

We launched our first teas last autumn – Welsh Black and Welsh Gold, made on the farm using different processing methods. Leaves pick up their flavour profile from soil, nutrients, climate and processing, so each location results in a tea that's completely unique. Ours are very smooth with hints of fruit.

✦ peterstontea.com



Susie is part of a female growers' collective

'I get up in the night to check my leaves'



Susie Walker-Munro, 54, runs the Kinnettles Tea Garden in Angus, Scotland.

I've been producing tea, Kinnettles Gold, on my farm since 2015, but I've also recently joined eight other women growers in a collective, the Tea Gardens of Scotland. Our first tea will be ready to launch in September. It's grown from cold-tolerant seed we bought in from Nepal and Georgia in 2016. We planted around 20,000 bushes and began plucking the leaves in May.

These will be turned into

black tea at The Scottish Tea Factory in Perthshire, using the same artisan techniques I use for my own tea. It takes time and attention – I get up in the night to check the 'wither', making sure the newly plucked leaf isn't losing moisture too fast. But it's an amazing process and to be doing this in Scotland, you think, 'Wow!' ✦ teagardensofscotland.co.uk; scottishteafactory.co.uk



'I trained as a pastry chef, but my teas sold better than my cakes!'

Uma Satkunam, 52, is a London-based tea blender and founder of Miss TeaSmith teas.

I'd worked in finance for 22 years when I quit to retrain as a pastry chef. I had a need to be creative. At first I sold cakes at farmers' markets in east London, and concocted tea blends with spices, herbs and flowers. I loved bringing the flavours together, and the teas sold better than the cakes.

So I took time out to learn more, finally launching my online shop in July 2019.

I source the tea from Sri Lanka, where I was born, and production has moved from my kitchen table to a small London tea factory. The blends are refined versions of my original recipes, such as Dark Romance with mint chocolate, and Earl on the Moor, an

Earl Grey tea infused with blood orange. ✦ missteasmith.com



Uma invents her own tea blends from flowers and spices



It's Charles II's Portuguese wife, Catherine of Braganza, we have to thank for tea's popularity in Britain. Tea was new to this country when the couple married in 1662, but it had been traded from China to Portugal for decades. The new queen drank tea regularly – she even brought a crate of it from home – making it instantly fashionable here. In the 18th century, demand for cheaper tea led to widespread smuggling. So in 1784, the government slashed the duty, and consumption soared. We now drink around 100 million cups of tea a day*.



WORDS: MIRIAM RODELL. PHOTOS: ASHLEY COOMBS PHOTOGRAPHY, EMMA MARSHALL. PETERSTON TEA. *STUDY BY UK TEA AND INFUSIONS ASSOCIATION