

Ilex paraguariensis

[Synonyms : *Ilex paraguayensis*]

MATÉ (English, French, German, Italian, Swedish) is an evergreen shrub or tree. Native to Paraguay, Brazil and Argentina, it has tiny greenish-white flowers.

It is also known as *Aquifoglio Paragua* (Italian), *Arbre à maté* (French), Brazil tea, *Cesmína paraguayská* (Czech, Slovak), *Hervea*, Holly, *Houx maté* (French), *Ilekso Paragvaja* (Esperanto), Jesuit's Brazil tea, Jesuit's tea, *Matébaum* (German), *Matee* (Finnish), *Matéstrauch* (German), Paraguay, Paraguay herb, Paraguay tea, St. Bartholomew's tea, Tea of the Missions, *Thé du Mexique* (French), *Thé du Paraguay* (French), Yerba, and *Yerbabaum* (German).

The leaves are collected from early Summer through the Winter from plants at least 3 years old. These are subjected to heat (roasted) to retain their colour and aroma and then powdered and stored for up to 1 year before use. An essence is extracted from the leaves. Infused (for no more than 3 minutes) as a tea or steeped, the dried leaves have a pleasant bitter aromatic taste although the infusion has an initial but passing, disagreeable smell.

Warning – the caffeine content (although at least 25% less than coffee, *Coffea*, and just less than tea, *Camellia sinensis*) may reduce the effectiveness of some drugs taken as medication. In large doses it can cause vomiting and purging.

Paraguariensis means 'of or from Paraguay'.

Years ago the leaves, that traditionally today are infused to make a tea, were chewed raw.

Maté is the name used in South America today for the tea itself, but it was originally chosen by the Inkas for the containers from which that tea is drunk. These are the calabashes (hollow gourds) fitted with a special tube through which the tea is drawn. The dried leaves have been infused (like those for Indian or China tea, *Camellia sinensis*) and drunk for hundreds of years as a stimulating tonic tea by South Americans (at the beginning of the 21st Century, 20 million of them) and is probably enjoyed more frequently than any other beverage. This green, pleasant, slightly bitter-tasting drink is prepared by either pouring hot water over powdered leaves, or by steeping them in cold water and in either case then filtering the liquid. (Lemon and/or sugar can be added to it.) Taken to excess it has the same effect as alcohol.

The Jesuits, whose Missions were the first to cultivate maté, recorded the practice in the 16th Century after which it was known as 'Jesuit's tea'. It is only recently that the tea is beginning to become known in Europe and can sometimes be called Natural coffee substitute.

The perfumery industry uses the leaf extract as a commercial ingredient in floral perfumes. Medicinally, the leaves have been used to treat rheumatic pains and mild depression.