

It's tea's time!

A major growth star in the beverage category, ready-to-drink (RTD) tea is undergoing a lifestyle makeover. The drink North Americans generally refer to as “iced tea” is hot, hot, hot!

Available in a dizzying array of green, black, fruit or herbal-based options – refrigerated or on the shelf – RTD teas offer consumers the convenience of enjoying this ancient favorite either on-the-go or at home.

According to market research company Euromonitor International, the size of the global RTD tea market has grown by roughly 25 percent since 2011. Forty billion liters were sold in 2016 and this figure is expected to reach 45 billion liters by the end of 2022. Overall lifestyle changes, increasing disposable income and the move away from carbonated drinks, including to some degree alcohol and even juice, are the main drivers fueling this growth.

THEY'RE READY TO DRINK TEA

Millennials in particular are turning to tea largely due to the health benefits often associated with it, including anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, cancer and cardiovascular protection and weight loss stimulation. They are also looking for ways to express themselves via their product choices and thirsty for authentic stories; this includes where the tea comes from and its unique properties – further enhancing tea's aura and appeal. As a result, brands are placing more emphasis on natural ingredients and honing in on trends and flavors that resonate locally, which has led to an explosion in flavors and combinations.

Three-quarters of worldwide RTD tea sales are in Asia and as a result, the category is more highly developed there with a wider variety of brands, flavors and health-enhanced products than found elsewhere. Euromonitor International has ranked the top ten RTD tea countries in terms of liters sold, with China taking the lead, followed by Japan, the U.S., Indonesia, Vietnam, Taiwan, Germany, Italy, Thailand and Canada.



REACHING FOR THE TOP SHELF

Tea, including the RTD market are shifting upwards in terms of quality to keep pace with increased interest in healthier ingredients and authentic tea experiences. As consumers become more tea-savvy, brands are responding by bringing tea leaves directly into the plant as part of their brewing process and moving away from teas made from liquid extracts and powders. Doing so allows brands to enter the 'premium' tea space, which not only has implications on price, but also on how manufacturers are connecting and communicating with consumers.

The category is awash with trends, one being, cold-brewed tea, which followed on the heels of cold-brewed coffee. As its name suggests, it is made with tea leaves that have been steeped in cold water for up to 24 hours. This brewing style requires more leaves to ensure that enough flavor is extracted. Although still considered a niche product, its devotees, particularly in Asia and Europe, claim it produces a more full-flavored and less bitter tea.

CRAFTING UNIQUE FLAVORS FOR UNIQUE CUSTOMERS

With diverse consumer tastes – which can change quite quickly and vary tremendously from market to market – it's fair to say that the RTD tea category is dynamic.

GEA understands the subtleties of both its customers and the teas brands want to create for consumers. With a strong portfolio covering North America to Asia and everywhere in between, GEA's RTD tea customers include local and regional champions as well as global beverage players.

GEA offers end-to-end RTD tea solutions, which often begins during the pilot process at one of our eight facilities for process testing and product development. Here we collaborate with customers to try out new recipes and ingredients. For manufacturers with a global footprint, GEA helps them achieve economies of scale by designing a single brewing solution and then adapting it to local requirements.

“Our solutions are digi-ready and plant operators appreciate our proven data analytics tools. We're also constantly looking for opportunities to maximize energy recovery throughout the entire brewing process,” says Lisa Eckman, GEA Regional Sales Manager for Beverages, U.S. “GEA has superior credentials in the sensitive beverage sector, including global tea experience, but we don't take anything for granted. We always assemble a solutions-driven team for our customers – sometimes from more than ten different countries, depending on the size and complexity of the project,” explains Eckman.

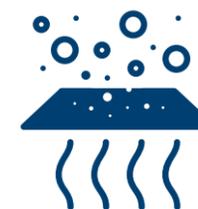
Ready-to-drink tea brought to you by GEA

Whether it's testing or the design, construction and installation of 24/7 turnkey plants, processing lines or modular technologies you need, GEA is the right partner. We cover the entire RTD tea production process, including the following key steps:



Tea brewing

GEA test centers, including a dedicated RTD tea pilot process facility in Ahaus, Germany, help customers achieve the perfect brew. Here, working with GEA technologists and other process experts, customers can take risks and experiment with different ingredients and formulations to be sure they get exactly the overtones and profiles they want for their teas before investing further.



Clarification

GEA's credentials in separation technology are best in class across numerous applications, including in the production of RTD tea. Our hygienic designs ensure the production of brilliantly clear and consistent tea.



Thermal treatment

Following clarification, RTD tea is heat-treated and hygienically bottled to ensure product safety and promote a long shelf life. GEA offers thermal treatment systems covering heating & cooling, pasteurization, UHT treatment and in-line cooling.



Aseptic filling

GEA aseptic fillers eliminate any possible risk to the product, meet critical environmental control requirements and achieve the best performance in terms of filling speed, accuracy, flexibility and safety.