خلّينا نسافر!

So far, all of the steps we have engaged look at tea in Morocco. But certainly Moroccans aren't the only people in the Arab world who drink tea, right? Of course not!

In the same way that there is regional variation in how tea is drunk within Morocco, tea and similar drinks are consumed in many different styles and manners throughout the larger Arab world. To get an idea of this extant diversity, begin by having a look at this infographic presented by the Qatar Foundation. What variation do you notice? Which drink sounds the most appetizing to you?

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Now, let's take a closer look at one of the tea cultures you just read briefly about. To do so, we'll need to go on a journey to Egypt, where we'll reading about a tea-like drink made from the flowers of the hibiscus plant, known in Arabic as *karkadiih* كركديه . Strictly speaking, this is not a true "tea," as Arabs tend to use the word *shaay* شاي to refer only to drinks made with the leaves of the true tea plant. But the culture of drinking *karkadiih* has many parallels. Let's read the article and prepare to discuss:

THE RED TEA OF EGYPT

By John Feeney
Published in the Saudi Aramco World, Volume 52, Number 5, September/October 2001
Source link

Tart, bright-red hibiscus tea, known in Arabic as *karkady*, has been popular in many lands for hundreds of years—especially in Africa—and nowhere more so than in Egypt and the Sudan. In most of the West, on the other hand, it remains virtually unknown, though Germany, the West Indies and Mexico are exceptions. But karkady is making inroads: You can sometimes find a handful of it in the trendier sort of US supermarket, enough for a few glasses, done up in small plastic bags and sold for a high price. The Hudson Falafel Restaurant, in New York's Greenwich Village, will serve you a glass of "iced karkady hibiscus" for one dollar, which is reasonable. And it is as an iced summer drink, described as close to cranberry juice in taste, that karkady is at its best.

The karkady plant, *Hibiscus sabdariffa*, is said to have come originally from Southeast Asia. Today, the tall two-meter (6') red cane is grown widely in Egypt and Sudan, as well as in Thailand, China, Tanzania, Mali and Senegal, and it is known by

different names in different lands. In the western hemisphere it is grown occasionally in South America but commonly in Mexico, where the tea is one of the most popular summer drinks and the plant is known as *flor de Jamaica.* This name is misleading, for although Jamaica is indeed a karkady-growing island, the drink is not made from the hibiscus flower but from the dried segments of the calyx that surrounds the seed-pod. In Jamaica itself, karkady is called *roselle,* or red sorrel, because, like sorrel, it has a lemony taste. In East Africa it is known as "Sudanese tea," the name deriving from the fact that more karkady is drunk daily in the Sudan than true tea. In Spain it is quimbombe chino. The Dutch found karkady in Suriname and called it *zuring*—sorrel again, and related to *zuur*,or "sour." The French, until recently, called it oseille rouge, ("red sorrel"), but now it is known there too as *karkady;* the Swiss call it *karkadé* as well.

In 1576, the Flemish botanist Matthias de L'Obel published his observations on karkady in *Plantarum seu stirpium historia.* Karkady seeds are thought to have been brought to the New World by African slaves or slave-traders; the plant was known to be growing in Brazil in the 17th century, in Jamaica in the early 18th century and Guatemala in the early 19th. In 1892, there were two factories in Queensland, Australia producing karkady jam and exporting it to Europe.

In 1895, Australian seeds were brought to California and to Hawaii, and karkady from Jamaican seed was apparently being grown experimentally in Florida before that. A Florida horticulturalist wrote that fresh hibiscus calyces were being sold by the quart in southern Florida in 1907, and they were known as "Florida cranberry" until post-war urban sprawl—punctuated by a hurricane and a freeze—wiped out the commercial karkady gardens about 1960. This was bad luck, for Florida has the main things karkady needs to flourish and take on its wonderful red color: warmth and long hours of summer sunlight. Both, however, are also reliably available in Egypt, where today karkady is grown abundantly and dependably.

I first heard about karkady more than 40 years ago. Before setting out from my home in Montreal for my first visit to Cairo, a well-traveled friend asked me to see if I could find out about "a drink called karkady" when I got to Egypt. In his young days as a student at the Glasgow School of Fine Arts, he told me, he had had an Egyptian friend who was always longing for a drink of this "karkady," but no one in Glasgow had ever heard of it, and he had always wondered what it was.

Reaching Cairo in mid-summer I surprised everyone by immediately asking for "a glass of karkady." "How did you know about karkady?" they asked. It was a torrid June day and I was hurried out to a nearby café and given my first glass. A few days later I sent off a bulky package of the best quality dried karkady calyces to my friend in Montreal. In those days a kilo (35 oz) cost just 25 piastres; today a kilo of the best "black" karkady costs 16 Egyptian pounds, or about $4.50, at the same humble stalls in the spice market of Old Cairo.

Not long after that introduction, I began serving karkady to my guests in Cairo. Friends from the Ministry of Culture be-

gan doing the same, serving glasses of the bright red drink to visitors instead of the more traditional Turkish coffee. Soon afterward karkady took off and many five-star hotels in Cairo began offering "karkady tea" to their guests—iced in summer, hot in winter.

The main Egyptian karkady plantations today are in the dry, hot regions of Upper Egypt around Qena and Aswan and in the oasis of Fayoum; there are some also in parts of the Nile Delta. I have even found small, stunted karkady plants growing wild, the seeds blown by the wind, in the arid sand around the pharaonic temples of Abu Simbel, close to the Egyptian border with Sudan. (Most of Sudan's karkady is grown several hundred kilometers to the south, in the central province of Kordofan.)

The plant is a deep-rooted annual, requiring fertile sandy soil, warmth and plenty of water. It also needs some 13 hours of sunlight during the first four to five months of growth. The tall slender red canes, with green, red-streaked leaves, grow tall, and when the days grow shorter and the sunshine less intense, small pinkish-white flowers appear at intervals all the way up. Opening at dawn, the flowers wither by mid-day. Once the seeds begin to form, the large, fleshy red calyces—they are not petals—form around the seed-pods, and grow crisp and juicy. It is this outer covering that is gathered and dried to make karkady.
The calyces mature during the long, hot days of summer, and the harvest begins in the autumn. Millions upon millions of seed-pods must be snapped off the canes one by one, by hand, as they mature from the bottom of the canes toward the top. It is tiring, stoop-and-stretch work. Karkady-pickers will tell you the pods break off the canes more easily in the morning than in the afternoon.

Having harvested millions of seed-pods, the workers then strip off tens of millions of the bright red calyces, again by hand, and lay them out to dry in the sun for three to four days. The karkady is then ready for market. The drink is made in much the same way as a cup of tea. For best results, take a full handful of the dark, almost purple-black, karkady. (The light red kind has less flavor and contains more acid.) Pour on four glasses of cold water. Bring to the boil and simmer for three minutes. Strain off what is now a bright red liquid. Barely cover the calyces again with fresh cold water and give them another three-minute boil to extract all you can. Add this to the tea from the first boil. Add sugar to taste, probably about a tablespoon to each glass. (The boiled husks, by now completely sterilized, make an excellent substitute for sphagnum moss in the garden.)

Or, if you have time, you might try making karkady tea the Sudanese way, similar to American "sun tea." Soak the dried karkady in cold water for two days and then, without any boiling, strain off the liquid. This method, the Sudanese say, extracts a fuller flavor, and in my experience they tend to be right; however, you have to plan your karkady-drinking well ahead of time.
Below is my own recipe for a "Karkady Spectacular," suitable for serving on such days

as the end of Ramadan or Christmas and New Year's Day—all occasions when the glorious red color of the drink fits the festivity. During the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan, many Egyptian families now break their day-long fast at sunset with glasses of karkady instead of the traditional apricot drink, *gamar al-din.*

There is another intriguing aspect to *Hibiscus sabdariffa*: The whole plant is edible—leaves, seeds, calyces and roots—though it is apparently more healthful and nutritious than outright delicious: One source records that "intensive usage was reported during famine. Leaves were eaten green or dry, cooked with onions and groundnuts [peanuts]." Leaves, seeds and calyces are used in Guinea as a diuretic and as a sedative. In Burma, the seeds are used as an aphrodisiac, in Taiwan as a laxative. In the Philippines the bitter root is roasted, skinned and eaten to stimulate the appetite. In Angola, the heated leaves, which produce a thick juice like *Aloe vera*, are used as a poultice to speed the healing of wounds. In several countries it is a folk remedy for certain cancers. Sudanese herbalists believe that karkady lowers blood pressure—and western scientists have confirmed the claim, identifying a glucoside, hibiscin, as the agent. Cairo doctors invariably prescribe drinking two glasses of karkady a day, along with other medication, for their hypertensive patients.

Karkady is also useful as a vegetable. The freshly picked sepals, tasting slightly of lemon, can be roughly chopped and mixed into an oiled lettuce salad. In the West Indies, karkady is used to season curries and make jelly, syrup, puddings, sherbet and sauces.

In the early 1960's, when the world awoke to the dangers of some synthetic food dyes, karkady became a popular natural coloring agent for many drinks and foods, and even for pink and red meats. These days much of the karkady used for coloring is supplied by Senegal, where the dried calyces are pressed into 80-kilogram (175-lb) balls for shipment to pharmaceutical and food manufacturers in Europe.

As a ravishing bright red drink, as a folk remedy, as a pharmaceutical aid and commercial coloring agent, karkady is surely one of the Earth's "wonder plants," a gift of God that seems almost a remnant of the Garden of Eden. What more can you ask of a single plant?

Karkady Spectacular - a recipe

- Four glassfuls of strong, freshly brewed karkady
- One cup freshly squeezed orange juice
- Juice of one or two limes
- Two teaspoons freshly grated orange peel
- One teaspoon freshly grated ginger
- Sugar to taste
- Make sure the oranges are organic. Mix all the ingredients in an enamel or stainless steel pot (never metal).
- Bring to a boil, simmer for three minutes and strain.
- Serve very hot, in thick glasses, or iced, in thin glasses.

Now that you've read, **let's discuss:**

- What do we know about the author? Where is he from, and how long has he been in Egypt?
- Has hibiscus tea always been in Egypt? What do you know about its origins, different names for it, and the ways in which it might have become popular?
- In addition to Egypt, the author also mentions another Arabic-speaking country. Which country is that? Why might these countries share similar tea cultures?
- What does the author say about the role of hibiscus tea in religious festivals and celebrations? Which ones does he specifically mention?
- How do you think the culture of hibiscus tea consumption in Egypt compares to that of green mint tea in Morocco? Try to name two ways in which it is similar, and two ways in which it is different.
- Where might you be able to get hibiscus tea in your home country? If there isn't a store that sells Arabic foodstuffs specifically, where else might be a reasonable place to look?