

# Tea of the Month



## SPRING 2011 WILD PURPLE TEA

**W**e hike until the bird-song seems to come from within you. The forest breathes with you, as well—its out-breath is your in, back and forth. There is that feeling of Nature when it is free, which resonates like the rhythm beneath the birds' melodies within you, and makes you feel free, too. This forest is ancient. It feels old and rooted. The small waterfalls and creeks remind you that they lead up and out of this jungle—up to the top of the world. The snowy Himalayan springs seem so distant here, though their energy is a part of the thrumming forest, the dark, loamy soil and the lives of the trees and animals. After walking much further than you thought you would, we round a bend and stop. We leave the path and follow a small, lesser-worn trail into the bush. Over a small rise and down into a valley, we come upon the tea garden. All around are thousands of other trees; the kind you look up through, mingling with their moss-covered twists to blend into the blue sky above. The tea trees are amazingly dark purple all over. The purples shift and dance into greens

all over the trees. Holding a bunch of leaves in your hands, you turn them towards the sun and watch the blue-purple shift to redder hues as the light passes through them.

We harvest the tea together with the aboriginals and you feel more connected to Tea than ever. And these magic trees are like no other Tea tree you've been around, with a wild, feminine energy all their own. They are a mystical secret you've been initiated into—a stirring tale of ancient and magic medicines, brewed by old sages that can fly...

Yunnan is a magical forest: vibrant and radiant with life, it is home to more than twenty-five percent of all China's living species. Crystal waters flow down from the top of the Earth, mineralized on their way down from the Tibetan plateau. Plants are larger here, boasting astonishing blossoms and greater crowns than could be imagined. The mists and rain, minerals, crystals and water all effuse the forests of Yunnan with an unbelievable abundance.

The old tea trees have roots that delve deep into the earth: over

thirty feet for a five-foot tall tree, and much deeper for taller, old-growth trees. This fills Yunnan tea with trace minerals that can't be found in any other substance on Earth, which help connect us to our Source.

Last issue, we discussed what Living Tea is and why it has such healing potential. We talked about the six characteristics of Living Tea: Seed-propagation, room to grow, biodiversity, no irrigation, chemical-free and a healthy relationship with the humans who tend it. This month's tea is definitely a Living Tea, and through it we can explore the first of these, seed-propagation, in greater detail.

Tea is a sexual plant, which means that it is cross-pollinated. A tremendous amount of natural energy goes into the creation of a Tea seed, including bugs and forest, sun and sky. Each one carries great energy within it. And no two Tea seeds are alike. They will each produce a completely unique Tea tree, which is why Tea has done so well traveling to different climates.





"Rainforest"



De Hong, Yunnan



Raw, Sheng Puerh



De'Ang Aboriginal Tribe



~1000 Meters



## De Hong Autonomous Prefecture

**D**e Hong is located in the very western part of Yunnan. The “De” means “below” and the “Hong” is the Nu Jiang River. It borders Myanmar on three of its sides. The area is around 12,000 square kilometers spread over four counties: Lu Xi, Long Chuan, Yin Jiang and Liang He. The population is around one million, and more than half are aboriginal. The major tribes there are the Dai, Jing Po, A' Chang, Li Su and De' Ang. These tribes live on both sides of the border, and until recently traveled across it daily without any check.

We have discussed the De' Ang before, as they are one of the tribes in Yunnan that believe all Life on Earth to be descended from Tea. Most tribes have myths and/or belief systems in which they themselves are descended from Tea. These peoples have used Tea medicine for thousands and thousands of years. The heritage of the people in De Hong still thrives, and traveling there, one will meet many natives who still carry bundles of tea in their coats, ready to share some with any guest they meet.

Most of De Hong is rainforest. In fact, thousands of square kilometers are still pristine. The Da Ying Jiang and Rui Li Jiang rivers feed the forest, and the amazing trees there. There is a very active market for precious stones passing through Myanmar into China, attracting buyers and tourists from across China and beyond. De Hong is a gorgeous part of Yunnan. The rare, precious, wild tea trees alone make a trip there rewarding, indeed.

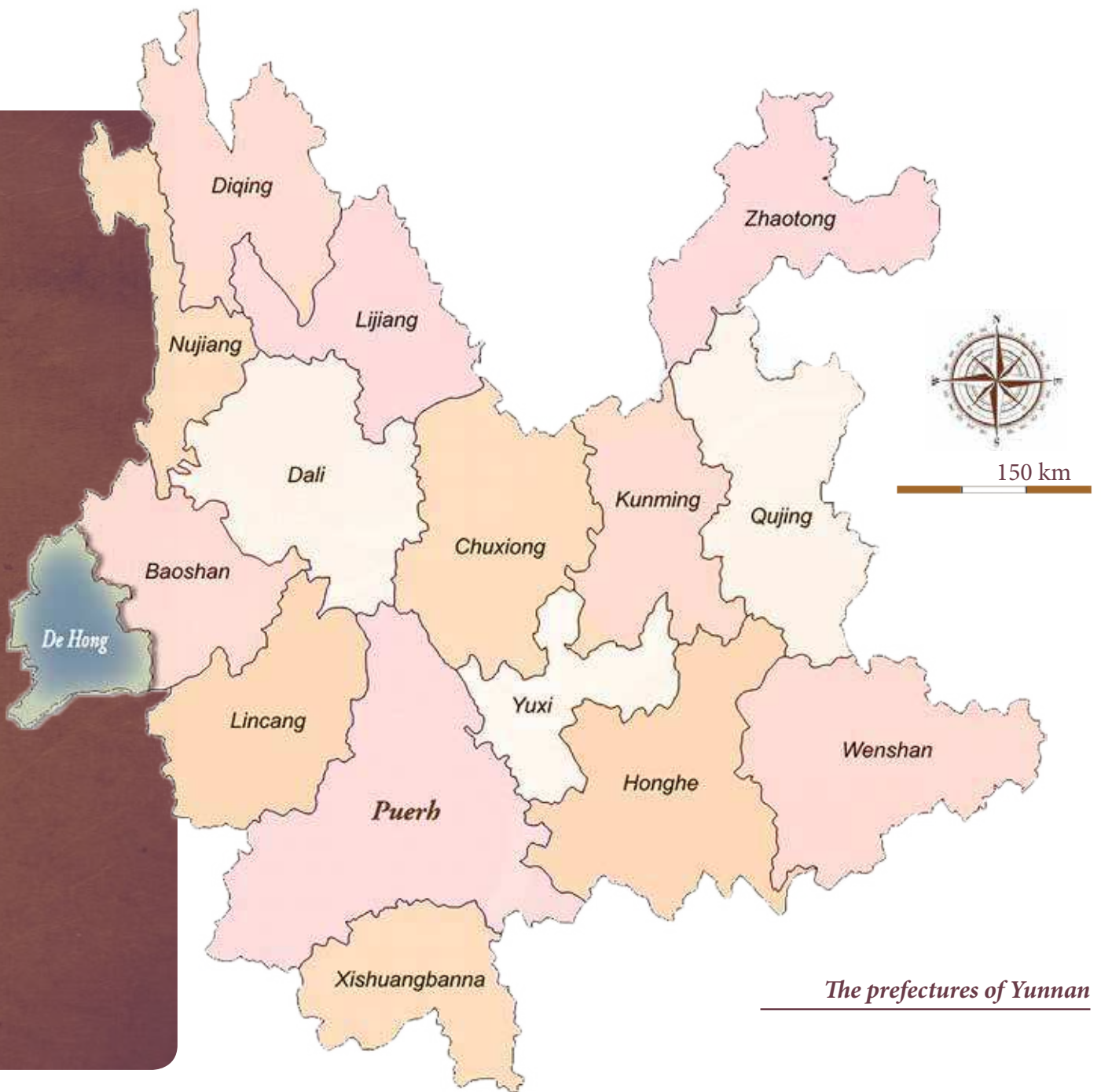
De Hong is home to many rare varieties of wild tea trees, including those with purple leaves. More than 4,000 years ago, ancestors of today's De' Ang ethnic group, the Pu, harvested and consumed tea leaves. Later, they even planted entire tea gardens. De Hong still contains numerous hundred-and-thousand-year-old tea trees and tea gardens. Most were planted and are still cared for by members of the De' Ang tribe. Consequently, historians refer to the De' Ang people as "China's ancient tea farmers."

If you plant a thousand seeds, the chances that one of them will survive are high. Unfortunately, very little Tea in the world is seed-propagated. The reason, of course, is industry and the commoditization of Tea. Sadly, Tea faces many of the problems that all agricultural products are haunted by. Most tea plantations use cuttings from a tree, planted to produce another. They are in essence clones. They do this to achieve a uniformity of flavor. Also, with a few hundred, or even thousands of different trees, all with different needs, the farmer would potentially have a lot more work to do.

It took millennia for trees like Tea to develop sexual cross-fertilization. It is also tremendously difficult for such trees to fertilize one another, since the mates cannot move towards embrace the way that animals and people can. As a result, plants have developed magnificent ways of fertilizing each other, enticing insects to pollinate them, using the wind, etc. There is a reason for all this. Carl Sagan said that the evolution from asexual to sexual reproduction on this planet was as significant as the beginning of life itself, as it allows for all the creative power in Nature to assert itself in such myriad forms. There is something deep

and powerful missing when a plant is not allowed to cross-fertilize. The variety in Nature is magic, just as in humans. Every tree is then different. Sure, they share some similarities due to common genetic heritage and similar terroir (climate, soil, etc.), but like people they each have their own medicine, their own perspective, experience and wisdom.

Nature has been creating life for millennia, so it is very unhealthy for us to assume that we can improve or alter her designs. Our attempts to interfere with Nature rarely take into account all the biodiversity and infinite, immeasurable connections there are between species.



*The prefectures of Yunnan*

We take control of an environment and monocrop it, domineering a few factors in a huge web of symmetry. As we've done this to larger and more diverse areas, our meddling has begun to have a global impact, changing the Environment (capital 'E') rather than just the places where we farm.

Actually, none of our creations ever come close to the power or beauty of Nature, especially since we too are one of Her greater masterpieces—so all that we create also owes homage to Mother Earth, ultimately. Allowing Her creative license is an important aspect of the diversity of life that sustains this

planet, and any given environment. When tea is natural and seed-propagated, every single tree is unique. Mutations arise. They each have a place and a hue, and in that way She can create more and varied medicine for us. It is presumptuous to assume that all the variety in tea is man-made, and has to do exclusively with processing, as some authors would suggest. A tremendous amount of variety is natural-born and defies our limited categories.

Because every seed produces a new and unique tea tree, Nature has provided us with a tremendous variety of trees (some are man-made, called “cultivars”, but most are nat-

ural). And there are more varieties in Yunnan than anywhere else, in part because tea has been growing there longer than anywhere else, and in part because the tea is left alone and seed-propagated in many areas. There are even some varieties that are considered to have mutated strongly enough to be a new species, and not *Camellia sinensis* anymore!

### *Tea of the Month*

This month's tea marks yet another increase in quality for the teas of 2015. Our fantastic tea, “Rainforest” comes from wild tea





## *De' Ang women inviting us for tea*

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trees in the De Hong Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan. De Hong is still a minor producer compared to the three big tea-producing areas of Yunnan: Puerh, Lincang and Xishuangbanna. But this means that the tea gardens and forests of De Hong are also often cleaner and more pristine. Red tea production in De Hong has increased lately, but it is still very much a remote and aboriginal region, near the border of Myanmar. De Hong has traditionally been famous for its jade markets more than tea.

These wild trees have dark purple leaves due to natural mutation. They are higher in anti-oxidants and catechins than other varieties of tea. “Rainforest” comes from old-growth

trees that were harvested in the spring of 2011, and meticulously processed by aboriginal hands. The tea has a strong musky aroma, with fruity overtones that De Hong tea is famous for. This tea comes from the same kind of trees as our beloved purple-red, which we also shared with you in September of 2012. Those of you who have tried that delicious tea will recognize some of the same flavors, though less delicate. This tea is strong and vibrant; it’s a full-bodied Tea lover’s tea.

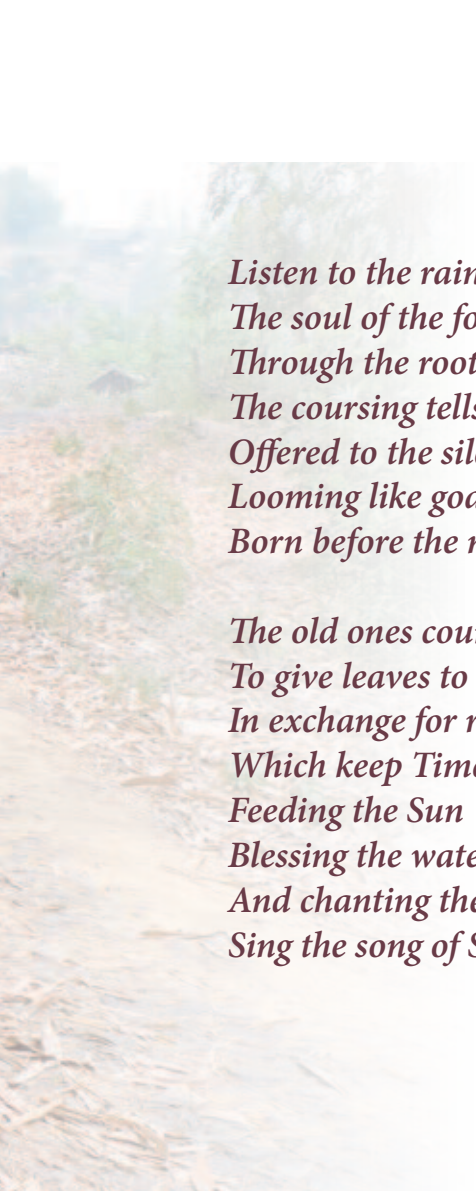
We find that wild teas like this exemplify all the power of Living Tea. As we all head outdoors to share more tea with Nature, we listen to the birds and the wind and wonder what they are saying. Nature

is always talking to us, and teas like this help us to understand what She is saying.

“Rainforest” is the perfect chance to connect with the older, deeper and non-linear aspects of Tea. In this day and age, many of us have lost our connections to the Sacred—in ourselves, our friends and even Nature. We no longer connect very deeply, not even with our own families. Tea like this month’s is good medicine for that.







*Listen to the rain  
The soul of the forest  
Through the roots of ancient trees  
The coursing tells stories  
Offered to the silent mountains  
Looming like gods  
Born before the memory of the seeds*

*The old ones counseled  
To give leaves to the walkers  
In exchange for rituals and prayers  
Which keep Time alive  
Feeding the Sun  
Blessing the water  
And chanting the wind  
Sing the song of Sourcing*

—Wu De



雨林

## *Brewing Tips for Rainforest*

**W**e find this tea very nice early in the morning. We would brew this tea in a nice, big side-handle pot, giving the compression room to open up and fully steep. Side-handle tea isn't meant to complicate the process; the spirit is the same as leaves in a bowl—the oldest brewing method on Earth. Over the last few centuries, the varieties and processing methods have grown exponentially. The great news is that we have a huge world of Tea to explore—one that may take us lifetimes. However, not all tea can be prepared by simply dropping leaves in a bowl anymore. Some teas are too fine, or the leaves are compressed like this month's, which means the liquor would be too strong and you'd get bits in your mouth. And yet, we want to be able to enjoy a tea in the spirit of simplicity: *leaves, water and heat*. For this we adopted the second oldest teaware, brewing tea in a side-handle and then decanting it into bowls. Actually, boiling tea in large side-handle pots was very common early on. That

was how all medicinal herbs were boiled, of which Tea was one.

Try pouring this month's tea into bowls and holding your bowl in the same way you would if the leaves were in it, with simplicity and grace. The large side-handle also gives the leaves more room to expand. Use good spring water for tea, whenever possible. And for heat, charcoal is the most desirable, then gas, and lastly electric heat sources. With spring water, charcoal, a side-handle and some bowls, you will have the perfect setup for this month! (If you don't have all that, you must bring the perfection from your heart!)

Try connecting to the Nature and wild forest these trees came from. Meditate on their purple leaves. We have been amazed at how accurate tea lovers around the world are in describing the place a tea comes from without us telling them, having never been there themselves. Sometimes they do this after their very first ever tea session. What connection do you experience through this tea?