

SF WEEKLY



Green tea is forecasted to be a continuing hot trend to drink and eat, and matcha, known widely as the mother of all green tea, is especially hot. **Matcha** traditionally is tea leaves that are selected and ground; the powder from these whole tea leaves is then carefully measured, sifted, scooped and whisked with water that is not hotter than 80 degrees.

It can be frothy fun, and Oakland-based author and food poet **Annelies Zijderveld** is a tea expert; look for her new book *Steeped: Recipes Infused with Tea* (Andrews McMeel Publishing) next April. Zijderveld helped suss out some hot holiday tea finds, sharing her matcha wisdom along the way.

Zijderveld has a pro tip on color: “When you are looking for matcha, the color speaks volumes. Exceptional matcha will be almost Technicolor in its green hue and usually comes with a steep price point to reflect the quality. Lower grade matcha is dull in color — more like the color of clay and rather flat tasting; it may be cheap, but you get what you pay for.”

Zijderveld says she has three bags and tins of matcha and points to **Silk Road Teas** as a local seller that she cooked with during recipe testing. She also likes matchas from Portland-based companies **Steven Smith Teas** (found at Whole Foods, Craftsman & Wolves, Mollie Stone's, Bryan's and **more spots** locally) and the **Tao of Tea**. She also likes the “wonderful variety” of **Ito En**, which has, count 'em, nine different kinds of matcha.

I was stoked to find out Zijderveld shares my enthusiasm for the green tea goods from **Aiya**, which has a new portable to go product of matcha (\$18.80 for 10 packets) that are vibrant in their green hue and tasty — a great nutty slash vegetal-in-a-good-way tea to try while stuffing stockings or maybe as a nice non-white elephant gift for an office pal. Aiya's matcha is hand picked from the Nishio area in Japan and available at both Berkeley Bowl locations as well as online.

For other tea-themed stocking stuffers that incorporate matcha, **Rainbow Grocery** has Vosges matcha green tea super dark chocolate bar (\$6.29) or mini bite-sized bars (\$0.89), according to Rainbow's Scott Bradley. For those looking to spend a bit more to get a matcha experience going, scoops and whisks made out of bamboo are integral to the process; I'll detail the some hot spots to find those next week.



A nice big(ger) ticket gift idea is the **Aiya matcha gift set with deep soil bowl and ceremonial grade matcha** (\$88), which brings a fancy yet non-precious touch of "voila!" to a process that has been around for over eight centuries — note the beautiful green hue therein. This set starts on a helpful note since it includes a DVD alongside factoids on antioxidants and amino acids, which are often among the reasons folks seek out this kind of tea in the first place.