



CULTURAL USES OF HERBS IN LATIN AMERICA

Level: middle - high school / grades 7-12/
Course: science, social studies

Rationale

The lesson plan requires that you have an adequate facility to set up laboratory type equipment. Science laboratory safety rules should be discussed with the students before beginning this activity. It might be a good idea to have a science teacher share the lab with you and collaborate in the teaching. Before doing the lab, explain to the students the significance of the use of beverages in social environments. For instance, you might want to discuss coffee in our society.

Background Information

Yerba mate is to the republics of southeastern South America what coffee is to the United States and tea to Great Britain- the most popular daily beverage, a ready source of refreshment and solace, a pledge of hospitality. Whether the occasion calls for special ceremony with the arrival of unusual guests or is merely the welcome, routine excuse presented by the dropping in of cronies and relatives, yerba mate is always prepared at once. Like the smoking of the pipe of peace, or passing of the wassail bowl, the mate goes from hand to hand among the assembled company in token of friendship (Yerba Mate (1946) Washington, DC: Pan American Union).

by
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Laboratory Activity: Preparing a simple tea of Yerba Mate

Objectives

1. Students will learn how to prepare a simple tea of yerba mate.
2. Students will become familiar with a very popular custom of southeastern South America that involves the cultural use of an herbal tea.

Materials Needed

dried out gourds (used as a cup and can be referred to as *mate*)

yerba mate -*Ilex Paraguayensis* (herb that can be purchased at an herb store)

bombilla-(metal straw with a little perforated ball at the sipping end)

Note: For this activity we will construct a “make-do” bombilla by covering the end of a plastic straw with a small piece of cheesecloth.

plastic straws

cheesecloth

hot plate

large flask, beaker, or pan (to heat water)

clean drinking water

paper towels for cleaning up

Procedures

1. Set up hot plate in a safe area where no one can get burned.
2. Fill beaker with water and place on hot plate to heat.
3. Put loose leaf yerba mate in dried out gourd.
4. When water is hot, pour into the gourd. The tea is made instantly.
5. Use straw with cheesecloth to drink. The cheesecloth should be at the mouth end of the straw as it will prevent the herb leaves from being swallowed. This is the best way to replicate a true bombilla.

Follow-up Activities

1. Have students a research project on the history of yerba mate.
2. Make a tea of yerba compuesta, which is not a brand of *Ilex Paraguayensis*, but a commercially prepared mix of yerba and several dried herbs. This one is less acidic and more healthful than the typically bitter tea made from pure yerba.

3. Have students research the medicinal value of yerba mate.
4. Have students research the economic value to local economies of yerba mate.

Bibliography

See lesson plan "Finding Out about Herbs in Latin America" for bibliographic references.