**Drink Tea in Bayouland? Sure They Did!**

*Grew It by Front Gate, Too-on Citronella Bushes*

**BY HELEN E. WURZLOW**

They're known the world over as demi-tassers—or is it cafe noirs?—the Louisiana bayou coffee drinkers.

But for tea—or is it tea?—drinking, their reputation hasn't even got to first base.

Yet once upon a time in Terrebonne bayouland history, tea-drinking was a serious threat to coffee-drinking's future name and fame.

That was in his grandmother's day, recalls L.J. Lapeyrouse of 150 Fane street, Houma, who once dwelt along the banks of Bayou Terrebonne at Montegut.

Tea drinking had one thing in its favor—the herb citronella—while native, could be easily grown in the bayou soil. His mother, the late Mrs. Edward Lapeyrouse, had a bush of the long, reed-like shrub with lemon-scented leaves, right at the front gate of their home, Mr. Lapeyrouse recalls.

All she had to do was to break a handful of the long, slender leaves from her bush, powder them hard for about 15 minutes, and then strain her tea.

**An Evening Drink**

With a little cream and sugar—perhaps a bit of lemon, if it suits your taste—it was a dish fit for a king or a queen, says Mr. Lapeyrouse, who has never given up his bayou tea-drinking habit.

The citronella can be dried or green—but it's tastier fresh off the stalk, he thinks.

Of course, citronella tea never really took the place of cafe noir or cafe au lait in bayouland as a morning beverage. The citronella was an evening drink, with supper, just before bedtime.

Coffee drinking is, was, and it seems always will be first in the hearts of the Louisiana bayou dwellers as a beverage, he relates.

But you could never pick your coffee off the bush down in the Terrebonne bayou country. It had to be imported from more tropical climes, says Clerk of Court Randolph A. Bazet, a bayou cafe noir, who has a bush of citronella growing in the garden of his Wilson avenue home in Houma, though he isn't a tea drinker.

The coffee shrub has never seemed to take to the bayou soil like citronella. In fact, most of the bayou coffee drinkers, says Mr. Lapeyrouse, have never seen coffee on the stalk. But had the dwellers of the bayous, who are so skilled in brewing their own world-famed cafe noir, been able to grow their own coffee, too, they would have found it very ornamental in their gardens.

**Ornamental, Too**

There are said to be some 25 varieties of coffee shrubs, all evergreen—prized for their handsome shiny leaves, fragrant white blossoms, and attractive red berries.

But unlike the bayou tea leaves, coffee is made from the beans or seeds, which are found within a pulpy fruit.

Citronella, too, is ornamental in the garden—though not quite as strikingly so as coffee would be. It's evergreen of the mint family, with a small yellow flower, though neither of the bayou coffee drinkers can recall seeing any flowers on their tea shrubs.

Citronella grows fast in the bayou soil. If you plan one stalk this year, by next year you'll have a pretty big bush, says Mr. Lapeyrouse, who also savors his morning coffee.

Although the bayou dwellers imported their coffee, they had never heard of imported tea half a century or more ago, he recalls. They grew their own right at their garden gates.

When Mr. Lapeyrouse came to live in Houma in 1921, he brought his citronella bush with him and planted it right at his front gate. He had never heard of citronella freezing, but in the hard freeze last year, his bush went with the cold.

Citronella tea-drinking has gone out of the bayou picture. The younger generation, all morning cafe noirs or cafe-au-laiters, seem to have forgotten all about it. None of them drink citronella, he says.

While citronella's mightly tasty for tea-making, it has another distinct advantage—the bayou mosquitoes don't go for it at all. In fact, the herb cultivated extensively in the South Sea Islands has gained far greater renown as a mosquito chaser than as a beverage, says Mr. Bazet.

Even though he may be the last of the citronella drinkers in bayou land, says Mr. Lapeyrouse, he's going to keep up the old bayou custom until he dies.

He's fixing to plant another citronella bush—yes, right at his front garden gate!