

Make sure it's sweet

By Michelle Eubanks

Photography by Daniel Giles

Some would argue that you can't eat a meal in the South without a tall glass of sweet iced tea to go with it.

Some of those same folks might tell you how you make the tea is irrelevant — just make sure it's sweet.

Connoisseurs on the subject say how sweet tea is made makes all the difference, and don't argue because, in the South, sweet tea is very close to a religion.

Heated debates about whether to use hot or boiling water are all but a foregone conclusion in many Southern homes as the sweet concoction is brewed. Still others might be downright offended if you use a brand that isn't Luzianne.

And don't even think about pulling a jar of powdered tea off the shelf or popping open a can of sweet tea rather than

making your own. It's truly blasphemous.

Regardless of how you make it, there are some things we know for sure about the beverage of the South.

In fact, the oldest printed recipe for the drink dates back to 1879 and a community cookbook called "Housekeeping in Old Virginia," which confirms sweet tea's place as a Southern invention.

This recipe called for green tea, a much lighter and delicate tea flavor that has become popular with today's hot tea drinkers. Black tea, the variety used most often in tea bags for brewing sweet tea today, first appeared in a recipe in 1884.

By 1893, the beverage had become almost ubiquitous, making an appearance at the

World's Fair that took place that year in Chicago.

Sweet tea has become so popular in Southern states that, in 1995, South Carolina officially adopted it as the Hospitality Beverage of the state.

Travel out of the South, and you might have trouble finding sweet tea on the menu, so you might have to do a little bit of improvising on your own.

Regardless, here are some recipes for sweet tea that might be your introduction to the beverage or a lesson in ways to prepare the drink a bit differently in the future.

If you choose the latter route, be prepared for an uprising. Southerners tend to get pretty attached to their favorite drink. **S**