

Tom Gordon presented a description of Mary Surles making the tea:

When Mary Surles prepared a recent batch, she spread a white cloth on a plastic table covering. On that cloth she placed and moistened two large, dried manure chunks, two lemons with their tops and bottoms removed, several dried stalks of a common silver-green plant known as rabbit-tobacco, and a cup of honey.

After knotting the cloth to form a sack, she lowered it into the boiling water of the saucepan and the clear water immediately turned brown.

As the boiling continued for several minutes, she added nine Halls honey lemon cough drops, Vicks drops, she said, would have been a little better. And a little corn liquor would have been a plus as well. The taste is a mix of honey, herbs, and lemon.

“It tastes like medicine is supposed to taste,” Surles said.

Gordon asks the question: “Is it safe?” and Surles, who he describes as an active woman who seems younger than her years, replies that she has made and drunk the tea too many times to count and so have her children. She comments that she has never known anyone “to get sick off that tea,” and that when you cook it, you sterilize all kinds of germs.

NOTE: The other women I talked with did not mention cough drops as an ingredient. However, “a little white lightning” was mentioned. The recipes varied.