

# Argentinian Supermarket

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**Mate** (Spanish: [\[ˈmate\]](#), Portuguese: [\[ˈmatʃi\]](#)) is a traditional South American caffeine-rich infused herbal drink. It is made by soaking dried leaves of the [yerba mate](#) (*Ilex paraguariensis*) in hot water and is traditionally served with a metal straw ([bombilla](#)) in a container typically made from a [calabash gourd](#) (also called the *mate*), but also in some areas made from an aromatic wood called “palo santo”.

It is the national beverage of Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay and is also consumed in the Bolivian [Chaco](#), Northern and [Southern Chile](#), [southern Brazil](#), [Syria](#) (the largest importer in the world) and [Lebanon](#) (specially by the Druze), immigrants from the Middle East brought it to their home countries from Paraguay and Argentina. In Paraguay mate is called *tereré* and is consumed cold.



Leaves are dried and chopped or ground to make the coarse powdery preparation called *yerba* pronounced “sherba”, which is not a synonym for ‘herb’, its meaning is exclusive for the mate infusion.

## Accessories



The metal straw is known as a [bombilla](#) and was traditionally made of [silver](#). Modern straws are typically made of nickel silver or stainless steel, The *bombilla* functions both as a straw and as a filter. The nickel silver\_submerged end is flared, with small holes or slots that allow the brewed liquid in, but block the chunky matter that makes up much of the mixture. A modern *bombilla* design uses a straight tube with holes or a spring sleeve to act as a filter.

The container the *mate* is served in is also known as *mate*. It is commonly made from [calabash gourd](#) but may also be made out of other materials like “palo santo” wood. An important addition is a steel wire, which can be made from a straightened paper clip, it is used to run inside the bombilla to push out residues and allow for easy sucking in the beverage, modern bombillas can be easily opened for cleaning.

## History

*Mate* was first consumed by the indigenous [Guaraní](#) who live in what is now Paraguay, southeastern Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, and was also spread by the [Tupí people](#) who lived in neighbouring areas. Afterwards, it was commercialized to part of southern Brazil and northeast Argentina, mostly some areas that were Paraguayan territory before the [Paraguayan War](#). Therefore, the scientific name of the yerba-mate is *Ilex paraguariensis*. The consumption of yerba-mate became widespread with the European colonization in the Spanish colony of Paraguay in the late 16th century, among both Spanish settlers and indigenous Guaraní, who consumed it before the Spanish arrival. Yerba *Mate* consumption spread in the 17th century to the [Río de la Plata](#) and from there to Peru and Chile.<sup>[11]</sup> This widespread consumption turned it into Paraguay's main [commodity](#) above other wares such as tobacco, cotton and beef. Aboriginal labour was used to harvest wild stands. In the mid-17th century, [Jesuits](#) managed to domesticate the plant and establish plantations in [their Indian reductions](#) in the Argentine province of [Misiones](#), sparking severe competition with the Paraguayan harvesters of wild strands. After [their expulsion](#) in the 1770s, the [Jesuit missions](#) — along with the yerba-mate plantations — fell into ruins. The industry continued to be of prime importance for the Paraguayan economy after independence, but development in benefit of the Paraguayan state halted after the [Paraguayan War](#) (1864–1870) that devastated the country both economically and demographically.

Brazil then became the largest producer of *mate*. In Brazilian and Argentine projects in late 19th and early 20th centuries, the plant was domesticated once again, opening the way for plantation systems. When Brazilian entrepreneurs turned their attention to coffee in the 1930s, Argentina, which had long been the prime consumer, took over as the largest producer, resurrecting the economy of [Misiones Province](#), where the Jesuits had once had most of their plantations. For years, the status of largest producer shifted between Brazil and Argentina.[\[12\]](#)

Today, Argentina is the largest producer with 56–62%, followed by Brazil, 34–36%, and Paraguay, 5%.[\[13\]](#) Uruguay is the largest consumer per capita, consuming around 19 litres per year.[\[14\]](#)

## Culture

*Mate* has a strong cultural significance for both national identity and society. Yerba *Mate* is the national drink of Paraguay, where it is also consumed with either hot or ice cold water ([tereré](#)), Argentina and Uruguay. Drinking *mate* is a common social practice in all of the territory of Paraguay and parts of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, southern Chile, and eastern Bolivia. Throughout the [Southern Cone](#), it is considered to be a tradition taken from the Paraguayan Guaraní and drunk by the [gauchos](#) term commonly used to describe the old residents of the South American [pampas](#), [chacos](#), or [Patagonian grasslands](#), found principally in parts of Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, southeastern Bolivia, southern Chile and southern Brazil. Argentina has celebrated National Mate Day every 30 November since 2015.[\[20\]](#)

Parque Histórico do Mate, funded by the state of [Paraná](#) (Brazil), is a park aimed to educate people on the sustainable harvesting methods needed to maintain the integrity and vitality of the oldest wild forests of *mate* in the world.[\[21\]](#)[\[22\]](#)

*Mate* is also consumed as an [iced tea](#) in various regions of Brazil, originating both from an industrialized form, produced by [Matte Leão](#), and from artisanal producers. It is part of the beach culture in [Rio de Janeiro](#), where it is widely sold by beach vendors;[\[23\]](#) the hot infused variation being uncommon in the area.

## Preparation



A traditional [calabash gourd](#) with a [kettle](#)

The preparation of *mate* is a simple process.

In this method the gourd is first filled two thirds with *yerba*. When the gourd is adequately filled, the preparer typically covers and seals the opening with the palm, then inverts it and shakes vigorously. This causes the finest, most powdery particles of the *yerba* to settle toward the preparer's palm and the top of the mate. After returning the container to its normal position, cold water is poured in and the leaves are soaked in it, then the bombilla goes in from a side and this cold mate is sucked and spit out once or twice, this will eliminate the remaining particles of powder and the bitter initial taste, this process is called priming the mate, in Spanish “cebar”. Now mate is ready for consumption, water has been boiled for sterilization and cooled to warm temperature, then poured into a thermal bottle to conserve temperature.



After enjoying several helpings the *yerba* inside loses some of its properties and taste, the mate becomes washed (Spanish “lavado”), so about half the *yerba* is removed and discarded and fresh *yerba* is added, it is not necessary to repeat the process of “cebado”, since the *yerba* underneath will act as a filter for the powder in the fresh *yerba*

The angled mound of *yerba* should remain, with its powdery peak still flat and mostly level with the top of the gourd. Water is poured always towards the bombilla, minimizing the soaking of the other side to allow for a longer enjoyment.

All of this careful settling of the *yerba* ensures that each sip contains as little particulate matter as possible, creating a smooth-running mate. The finest particles will then be as distant as possible from the filtering end of the straw. With each draw, the smaller particles would inevitably move toward the straw, but the larger particles and stems filter much of this out. A sloped

arrangement provides consistent concentration and flavor with each filling of the mate.



Statue of a man serving *mate*, in [Posadas](#), Misiones, Argentina