

# On the Importance of Yerba Mate in the Software Development Process

Adrian Kosmaczewski

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This paper will highlight the results of an extensive research conducted since the mid 90's, on the effects of the consumption of beverages based in the plant known as *Ilex paraguariensis*, in the framework of software development process activities in South America and some small parts of Europe.

This paper will provide an introduction to the herb commonly referred to as “Yerba Mate”, and will later delve into the advantages and disadvantages of such practice, in the context of the creation of software products.

## Introduction

Yerba Mate is defined by Wikipedia as follows:

Yerba mate or yerba-mate (Br.) (Spanish: yerba mate, Portuguese: erva-mate), *Ilex paraguariensis*, is a species of holly (family Aquifoliaceae) native to subtropical South America in northeastern Argentina, eastern Paraguay and southern Brazil. It was first scientifically classified by Swiss botanist Moses Bertoni, who settled in Paraguay in 1895.

The Yerba Mate (usually and wrongly spelled as “Yerba Maté” in English-speaking texts) is used in the preparation of a caffeinated beverage described by Wikipedia as follows:

Mate (Spanish pronunciation: [mate]), also known as chimarrão or cimarrón, is a traditional South American infused drink. It is prepared from steeping dried leaves of yerba mate (*Ilex paraguariensis*, known in Portuguese as erva mate) in hot water. It is the national drink in Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, and drinking it is a common social practice in parts of Brazil, Chile, eastern Bolivia, Lebanon and Syria. In Brazil, it is considered to be a tradition typical of the “Gaúchos”, name given to those born in Rio Grande do Sul. The drink contains caffeine.

(...)

The multicultural Yerba Mate Association of the Americas states that it is always improper to accent the second syllable, since doing so confuses the word with the unrelated Spanish word meaning “I killed.”

One of the phrases in the quoted paragraphs from Wikipedia brings to mind the importance of such a drink in the creation of software products (no, not the phrase about killing, the previous one). Caffeine is known for its capabilities in waking up inert areas of the brain, particularly during brain-damaging activities.

We consider unfortunate to qualify software development as a brain-damaging activity (although some research arrives to this particular conclusion), however, it is certainly a brain-intensive one, and as such, Yerba Mate has proven, in our tests, to be a particularly interesting option to coffee.

## Preparation

To prepare “Mate” (the beverage), three basic elements are required:

1. A recipient, usually also referred to as “mate” (to add to the confusion), but also called “guampa”, “cuia”, “calabaza”, and other names without any translation to English whatsoever. Among these names appears also “porongo”, as it is known in Uruguay; this word is usually avoided in Argentina, for the exact same reason the name “Mitsubishi Pajero” has been a commercial failure there. This element can be made of wood, metal or even be the hollow shell of a dried calabash.
2. A metallic straw, usually also referred to as “bombilla” or less commonly, “bomba”. This element can be made out of metal or wood, and is used to drink the infusion, avoiding to swallow the leaves of Yerba Mate at the same time. The best ones have their top part covered in gold, which protects the lips from the intense heat generated by the water in the metal, and also provides a sense of luxury into an otherwise rather humble activity.
3. Hot water, never boiled, at around 70 to 80 degrees Celsius (160 - 180 degrees Fahrenheit). It is very, very, VERY important to serve the water at the exact temperature, without boiling the water inadvertently. Usually, the best way to keep the water hot is with a thermos or vacuum flask, of which the latest industry benchmarks highlight the Uruguayan brand “Lumilagro” as the most reliable, competitive and durable in the market. European customers are best served by the standard thermos provided by Ikea.

Once all the elements are ready, the preparation process is fairly simple:

1. Add the Yerba Mate leaves in the mate (the recipient);
2. Put the right hand on top of the mate (recipient) covering the entrance, and using your left hand, turn the recipient upside down and shake it a little; then return the recipient to its normal position and dust the mate

- powder from your hand (it is strongly recommended not sniffing it);
3. Insert the straw in the recipient, creating a small hole in the Yerba at the same time;
  4. Pour in hot water, very slowly, in the hole caved in the previous step; on the first serve it is best to avoid filling the mate completely, to leave time to the yerba to get moist and release the flavor slowly;
  5. Drink the mate, by sipping at the straw, taking care not to burn your mouth or throat;
  6. Pass the mate around, which helps create and spread a sense of teamwork, to bring an ambience of relaxation and self-contemplation, and also to spread many known viruses.

## Advantages

In the context of software engineering, such a practice has the following advantages:

- Health benefits: The ingestion of mate (the beverage) contributes positively to the recommended daily intake of water (at least around 2 or 3 liters a day), and thus to the maintenance of a convenient hydration level in the brain, which is recognized by several studies as a major contribution to its productivity. Some recent papers even indicate that the habit of Mate drinking can reduce the risks of cancer, but in any case, Yerba Mate is also a major source of many important elements for a healthy daily diet:

It contains vitamins A, C, E, B1, B2, Niacin (B3), B5, B... and complex minerals like Calcium, Manganese, Iron, Selenium, Potassium, Magnesium, Phosphorus, and Zinc. It also contains Carotene, Fatty Acids, Chlorophyll, Flavonols, Polyphenols, Inositol, Trace Minerals, Antioxidants, Tannins, Pantothenic Acid, and 15 Amino Acids.

- Prolonged working hours: Instead of having to leave the desk to get yet another cup of coffee, the knowledge worker can sit in front of his computer for hours, particularly when using thermos with a capacity of at least 1 or 1.5 liters (around half a gallon). Mate (the beverage) is also known for reducing appetite, which helps reduce costs in the case of companies providing food to their employees.
- Teamwork benefits: Given the inherent social origins of the habit of drinking mate, in the case of teams, or in the case of agile practices such as pair programming, sharing the mate (the recipient) helps team managers to create a sense of unity and common goal.
- Increased sensitivity: As with all caffeinated drinks, the intake of mate can lead to an improvement in the overall awareness of the mate drinker.

## Disadvantages

The following disadvantages of Mate (the herb, the beverage and the recipient) are worth considering:

- Cold water effects: Although common practice in Paraguay (where the infusion of Yerba Mate with cold water is known as Tereré), this variant is known for causing violent reactions in the digestive system of the person drinking it, and it is strongly recommended to never drink it more than 20 meters away from the nearest toilet.
- Bitterness: The strong taste of Yerba Mate is also a factor of considerable debate. Most mate drinkers usually start drinking it with sugar (some even with saccharine or other sweeteners), while most experienced drinkers will dismiss this practice and downplay those doing it as amateurish or otherwise ignorant. It is strongly recommended to have everyone agree on a mate variant beforehand to avoid shallow discussions on the relative merits of different approaches to mate drinking.
- Mate lavado: When the same Yerba has been poured several times (usually above 10 or 12 servings, depending on the quality of the Yerba), it loses part of its taste and must be replaced with new Yerba. Depending on how many people share the same mate (the recipient), this can be a significant problem, leading to reduced productivity and major anxiety and dismay.
- “Matetiquette”: Mate (the beverage) is linked with a complete language, tied up to the history of the southern part of South America. As such, please be aware of the fact that serving a “mate lavado” (see previous item for an explanation of the concept) is considered rude practice, and is strongly discouraged. Serving mate with cold water, as explained above, can also be seen negatively, particularly if the person preparing the mate is not from Paraguay. Finally, talking in front of your recently-filled mate instead of drinking it, is also frowned upon, as you might be greeted with a “it’s not a microphone” protest if you do it.

## Conclusion

The importance of the Yerba Mate in the process of creation of software has been greatly dismissed by major research efforts, and we think that more research and mate drinking is needed. In our tests, Yerba Mate has been proven to foster creativity, teamwork, overall happiness, and trips to the toilets.