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Section 1. General

1.1 Introduction
This is the alt.smokers.pipes Frequently Asked Questions document. Its purpose is to provide an introduction to the newsgroup and present some general information on the Fine Art of Pipe Smoking. Please keep in mind that pipe smoking is indeed an art and not a science. There is no "wrong" way to smoke a pipe, just as there is no single "right" way. You will not learn how to smoke a pipe by reading this FAQ, or by reading anything else for that matter. You can only learn to smoke a pipe by actually doing so. The suggestions here are just that; your mileage may vary. The key is to relax and enjoy yourself. If your technique works for you, then it's right!

This FAQ will be posted biweekly to alt.smokers.pipes, and is archived at: http://www.aspipes.com/

Requests for clarification or expansion of specific points should be posted to alt.smokers.pipes. You are to be congratulated, by the way, for reading the FAQ before asking your question.

1.2 Posting Guidelines
(AKA "Keeping our Newsgroup Clean").

You are welcome to post to alt.smokers.pipes; however, you should probably read the newsgroup for a while (a week or two, perhaps), just to get a feel for the newsgroup before posting your first article. If you're new to USENET, or to the Internet in general, you'll certainly want to take a look at the documents posted to the newsgroup "news.announce.newusers," and you might want to visit some of the sites listed below:

AOL's USENET "netiquette" (Internet etiquette) guide:
http://webmaster.info.aol.com/netiquette/usenet/

"Net Lingo" (commonly used terms on the Internet):
http://www.netlingo.com/

Just about anything related to pipe smoking is welcome on alt.smokers.pipes. That includes, but is not limited to, discussions of the merits of specific pipes and pipe manufacturers, tobaccos, tobacco manufacturers and tobacco suppliers, pipe related esoterica, etc. We are, of course, a group dedicated to tobacco smoking. Other smoking substances have their own groups and venues and we would encourage you to go there to discuss them.

Commercial advertising is not forbidden, but vendors are asked to exercise restraint. It is the majority opinion that brief, periodic (i.e. once or twice a month) notices from pipe and tobacco vendors who maintain a continuous presence on the 'Net are acceptable; such announcements should consist of a *brief* introduction and a URL where the reader may find additional information. It is also requested that "[AD]" be included in the subject line, to designate the article as a commercial advertisement. Buy/sell/trade lists from private individuals are also acceptable, in moderation. NOTE: if you are in the practice of selling pipes on a continuous or semi-continuous basis, then you should consider yourself a commercial vendor and follow the appropriate guidelines, even if this is not your primary
source of income. Advertisements for items up for auction on eBay, etc. are considered to be commercial, as well. Posts of an informative nature by individuals not directly connected to a commercial concern do not fall into the commercial category. This is a fairly liberal policy; please don't abuse it.

Binary messages should not be posted to alt.smokers.pipes. (For those who don't know what this means, a "binary" is any file that is not plain ASCII and includes, but is not limited to, .gifs, .jpgs, .zip'd or otherwise compressed files, and word processor documents.) In fact, binary messages are not permitted in any discussion group unless specifically allowed by the charter. The members of ASP have decided that binaries are not appropriate for this group. This decision was made after long debate and a public vote; please observe it. There is an "alt.binaries.*" hierarchy, and any binaries should be posted there. Unfortunately, the binary groups are not available from all ISPs. In that case the binary file should be placed at some web or ftp site. In any event, announcements such as "I've placed xxx at yyy, please take a look at it" are appropriate to post in alt.smokers.pipes.

Please do not post articles in HTML format. Many people (myself included) choose not use HTML-capable newsreaders, and HTML tags make messages very difficult to read.

Political discussions are tolerated on the group, so long as they relate directly to pipe smoking and pipe smoking issues. Just do your best to be reasonably polite to the opposition when discussing these emotionally-charged issues.

"Meta-discussions", or discussions about the group itself, are common on ASP. These threads are important in helping people let off steam, but they often lead to long, bitter debates. When in doubt, consider starting a meta-discussion a bad idea. To help avoid them, be aware that too much off-topic posting is the biggest complaint in these threads.

Cross-posting to more than one group is a bad habit, although the consensus seems to be that this is not a breach of Net etiquette until the number of groups becomes too large (whatever that means). The problem is that follow-ups to that message are also posted to each group and huge snowballing flame wars erupt and rage interminably. These flame wars are of no interest to the thousands of people who read the victim groups. Before you post a response to a message, please check the headers to see if the original message was cross-posted. When following-up to a cross-posted message, always try to edit the header and post only to the group you actually read. Readers of the other groups will, sadly, miss your contributed wisdom. Finally, we take great pride in the fact that ASP is one of the most civil USENET newsgroups. While intelligent debate is perfectly acceptable, flames and personal attacks are not. We're all human, and tempers will inevitably flare, but please think twice before posting a response in the heat of the moment. When in doubt, take it to e-mail.

With all of the above stated, it is admitted that off topic posts can and will be made. Although not encouraged, it is recognized that there is a social aspect of ASP that many posters find desirable. Off topic posts should be made with restraint and preceded with the "[OT]" prefix in the header.

1.3 What Should I Do When I See An "Inappropriate" Post?

First, DO NOT POST A FOLLOW-UP TO THE GROUP. Let me say that one more time. DO NOT POST A FOLLOW-UP TO THE GROUP. This merely contributes to the problem. Examples of inappropriate posts and suggested responses are listed below.

TROLLS. "Trolls" are messages from people who derive perverse pleasure from driving others to anger. Often, these people will make a brief, inflammatory statement and sit back to watch the sparks fly. How do you know if a
message is a troll? If you think it might be, it probably is. RESPONSE: Ignore them completely. If you simply MUST respond, do it privately, via e-mail.

WRONG GROUP. Occasionally someone will make an honest mistake and post a message to the wrong group. Most people don't take the time to read FAQs, so they may be ignorant of what is considered appropriate for a specific group. A "wrong group" post can also result from a response to a cross-posted message. RESPONSE: Send an e-mail politely directing them to the appropriate group. Some relevant examples are listed below:

cigar smoking         alt.smokers.cigars
general smokers' issues  alt.smokers
non-smokers' issues     alt.support.non-smokers
quitting smoking       alt.support.stop-smoking
drugs (legal and otherwise)  alt.drugs.*

BINARIES. (See "posting guidelines" above.) RESPONSE: Politely ask the offender via e-mail not to do this, perhaps including a copy of the relevant portion of this FAQ.

FREQUENT REQUESTS. These are not inappropriate per se, but they do increase traffic and are a burden for those who would like to help newcomers and others just looking for information. RESPONSE: Direct them to this FAQ or to one of the many sources of information available on the Internet.

SPAMs. These are messages posted to a large number of groups, which the offender DOES NOT READ, often advertising a marginally legal method to "MAKE MONEY FAST." (Use of the word "SPAM" in this context, by the way, is derived from a Monty Python comedy skit.) The people who post these sorts of messages are the scum of the earth. USENET was designed on the "honor system," and some people have none. RESPONSE: IT IS POINTLESS TO REPLY to the message by posting to the newsgroup; the offender will never see your reply. If you want to reply privately by e-mail, that is your business. Be aware that many such messages have bogus return addresses so that you cannot reply. The best way to complain is to send e-mail to the postmaster at the offender's site. Again, because the sender's address may be bogus, you have to inspect the headers to see where it is really coming from. Even those headers may be forged. Copy the entire message, including all of the headers, and send it to the site's postmaster, with a brief introductory note. There are several newsgroups in the "news.admin.net-abuse.*" hierarchy for news of and comment on these abuses. Some other useful resources are listed below.

Net Abuse FAQ:
http://www.cybernothing.org/faqs/

net-abuse-faq.html
alt.spam FAQ (how to find the origin of a fake post or e-mail):
http://digital.net/~gandalf/spamfaq.html

TEST MESSAGES. Messages of the form "Test, don't read, please ignore" are not appropriate in any discussion group. The response to these should be the same as that for "wrong group" posts. If you need to test your newsreader, there is a group, alt.test, specifically for that purpose. In fact, many geographic domains maintain *.test newsgroups, and it is recommended that you use the one "closest" to you. NOTE: Many automatic mailers watch alt.test and will bombard you with copies of your test message. To avoid that, include the word "ignore" anywhere in your "Subject:" line. If you simply *MUST* post a message to ASP to test your newsreader, then at least take the time to say something about pipes.
Section 2. Beginning Pipe Smoking.

2.1 How Should I Select My First Pipe?
The short answer: "Pick one you like." If you need more guidance than that, keep reading.

MATERIAL. For your first pipe, you'll probably want one made of briar. "Briar" is wood from the burl (that portion between the root and the trunk) of the white heath (Erica arborea), a small tree or bush that grows in the Mediterranean region. Briar is durable, heat-resistant, and pleasing in appearance. There are other materials--such as clay, meerschaum, and porcelain--that are also used to make pipes, but these materials are fragile and lack the smoking characteristics and ease of use of briar. Corncob pipes are the least expensive option for a first pipe, and they are a viable alternative to briar; however, they often have very small bowls (the bowl is the part of the pipe that holds the tobacco) and brittle plastic stems (the part that you place in your mouth) that are quite easy to bite through. Most briar pipes have stems made of vulcanite (rubber) or lucite (acrylic); either material works fine, and stem material is purely a matter of personal choice. Vulcanite is softer, which many find more comfortable, but lucite is more durable and resists oxidation.

PRICE. Pipes range in price from a couple of dollars to several thousand; it is recommended that you stay closer to the lower end of this range for your first pipe. By purchasing a moderately-priced pipe, you will not be out a large sum if you determine that pipe smoking isn't for you. A reasonably good quality "basket pipe" (so called because most tobacconists keep their lower-priced, "no-name" pipes in an open basket near the sales counter) can be had for as little as $15, and many "name brand" manufacturers produce pipes in the $35-60 range. You'll probably want to avoid very small pipes, as they tend to smoke hot, and very large ones, as they are often harder for a novice to keep lit and may hold too much tobacco for a comfortably finish initially. Try not to purchase one of those pipes you may find in plastic bubble packaging at your local discount store if you can avoid it; instead, seek out a good tobacconist and ask for his or her recommendation. Not only will this give you a broader selection from which to choose, but the tobacconist is likely to have some good advice on how to get started. Don't be afraid to tell the shop owner that you're a novice. He or she will figure this out pretty quickly on their own anyway, and it is in their own best interest to help you select a pipe and tobacco that they think you'll enjoy. If you don't know where to find a reputable tobacconist, check the Pipes Digest Resource Guide at:

http://www.pipes.org/resource_guide.html

or ask the newsgroup for a recommendation. While you're buying the pipe, pick up a package of pipe cleaners (the soft, cotton ones are best for most purposes), and a cheap "pipe tool" or "tamper"; you'll need them.

FILTERS. You should not be inhaling smoke, so a filter is, in the opinion of many, superfluous. One major drawback to most filtering systems is that they tend to affect the taste of the tobacco--for the worse--if not kept meticulously clean. With that said, in some parts of the world, particularly central Europe, pipe filters are quite common. Many of the pipes sold there have a cavity in the shank (that part of the pipe that connects the bowl to the stem) designed to accommodate 9mm filters. There is absolutely nothing wrong with using a filter in your pipe. If you prefer filters, then by all means use them. Nevertheless, you don't need them.

SHAPE. This is purely a matter of personal taste. Many pipe smokers prefer pipes that are bent, as they "hang" easier, putting less strain on the teeth and jaw. Personally, I prefer straight- stemmed pipes, predominantly for aesthetic reasons, but also because it is easier to insert a pipe cleaner to absorb the condensate that occasionally collects in the shank while smoking. For a detailed study of pipe shapes and pipe anatomy, see The alt.smokers.pipes home page guide at: http://www.aspipes.com/
SECONDS. A true "second" is a pipe that has some kind of flaw (which is almost always cosmetic in nature) and is therefore not deemed worthy to carry the manufacturer's usual brand name. Typically, such pipes are simply stamped "Imported Briar," or something similar; however, some manufacturers have distinctive stampings for their cosmetically-challenged pipes (such as Peterson's "Irish Seconds"). You can find some very good pipes at a reduced price because they have surface flaws--pits, putty "fills" in the briar, imperfect carving, etc.--that do not affect the way they smoke at all. Many of the inexpensive pipes that you will find at your tobacconist (to include "basket pipes" and most "house brands") are "seconds" of one sort or another.

ESTATE PIPES. In the pipe smoking community, "estate" is a euphemism for "used." By buying an estate pipe, it is possible to get a high quality pipe for much less than it would cost new. (It is also possible to buy a piece of junk at a greatly inflated price, so caveat emptor applies.) While these pipes are usually thoroughly cleaned before they are sold, some people are appalled at the idea of smoking a pipe that was smoked by someone else; I wonder if these people bring their own silverware to restaurants. It should be noted that the previous owner's smoking habits will have at least a minor affect on the taste the pipe will impart to tobacco.

2.2 How Should I Select My First Tobacco?

This question lends itself to the short answer given in section 2.1 above. If you have had experience with only cigarettes and cigars, you're in for a real treat. The variety of pipe tobaccos is positively staggering, and the flavor of a blend is influenced not only by its component tobaccos, but also by myriad other factors such as the style of cut and the pipe used to smoke it. The only way to determine which sort of tobacco is right for you is to try a number of very different blends to decide which general type you like, and then proceed from there. Some of us are constantly searching for the perfect blend, affectionately known as "The Holy Grail."

"DRUGSTORE" TOBACCOS. Generally, you will be better off purchasing your tobacco from a tobacconist. Many of the commonly available blends found in discount stores or supermarkets are made from lower quality tobacco, and the additives with which they are laced for preservation and "taste enhancement" alter the way a tobacco smokes, usually for the worse. Of course, there is no harm at all in sampling these tobaccos; you may discover that one such blend is just your cup of tea. Most "drugstore blends" have been around for decades, so they must have something going for them.

AROMATICS VS. NON-AROMATICs. These are the two broadest subdivisions of pipe tobaccos. As a general rule, most beginning smokers tend to go for an "aromatic" tobacco, which has been "cased" or "topped" with flavorings such as vanilla, cherry, etc., while those converting from cigars or cigarettes often prefer an "non-aromatic" or "natural" tobacco.

AROMATICS. A good aromatic tobacco is lightly topped with a natural flavoring. Aromatics tend to be more moist than non-aromatics, which can lead to problems smoking them. These problems can be avoided if care is taken in the preparation of the tobacco and in the pack of the pipe.

NON-AROMATICs. These are tobaccos that contain no flavored additives; in fact, a good non-aromatic blend will contain no additives whatsoever, other than perhaps a bit of water. [SIDE NOTE: You may see the word "English" used as a descriptor for non-aromatic or natural blends. To some purists, an English blend contains only Virginias and Latakia (described below), and the term is used in a broad sense by some to refer to almost any unflavored tobacco (at one time, British law prohibited adulterants in tobacco). Typically, however, the term is used to describe a non-aromatic blend that contains Latakia.]

COMMON TYPES OF TOBACCO.
BURLEY. A low-sugar, high nicotine, slow-burning tobacco with a very subtle flavor, burley is often used as a base for aromatics or to modify the burning characteristics of a blend.

CAVENDISH. A term with a variety of meanings. Generally, a cavendish is "sweetened" in some way, either by a processing technique or by additives, or both.

LATAKIA. A "spice" tobacco that is cured over the smoke of particular types of wood. (You may read that it is cured over fires fueled by dried camel dung, but this is not the case.) Latakia has a distinctive "smoky" taste and a pungent aroma that some find very pleasant and others find just the opposite. Latakia adds body and depth to the flavor of many natural blends.

ORIENTALS. By definition, "Orientals" are those tobaccos indigenous to the eastern Mediterranean region, including the various "Turkish" tobaccos and Latakia. An "Oriental blend" contains at least one and often several of these tobaccos.

PERIQUE. Another "spice" tobacco grown only in St. James Parish, Louisiana. Perique is subjected to extreme pressure and is allowed to ferment as it is cured, which results in a very distinctive tobacco. TURKISH. Any of a number of tobaccos grown in numerous locales throughout the eastern Mediterranean region. Common "Turkish" varieties include Basma, Smyrna, Xanthi, Samsun, Izmir, Drama, and Yenidje. Generally, these names are derived from the region in which they are grown. Turkish tobaccos have a somewhat sweet, spicy flavor that gives "body" to many blends.

VIRGINIA. Despite the name, Virginias are grown in numerous locales. There are several varieties of Virginias, but all are characterized a relatively high sugar content. Virginias are often used as the base tobacco in blends, but they are smoked "straight" as well. Straight Virginias undergo changes in flavor as they age, similar to fine wines. Lighter in body than Oriental blends, they have a subtle complexity of flavor that makes them a favorite of many experienced smokers.

2.3 How Should I Store My Tobacco?

The moisture content of a tobacco affects the way it smokes and tastes; a tobacco that is too moist or too dry will not offer a pleasing smoke. One way to determine if your tobacco has the proper level of moisture is the "pinch test." Take a pinch of your tobacco and squeeze it tightly for a couple of seconds, then release it. If it immediately starts to "unravel," your tobacco is in good shape. If it stays in a tight clump, it is too wet. If it crumbles, it is too dry.

Tobacco purchased in tins should retain its moisture for several weeks after opening. Blends purchased in "bulk," or tinned tobaccos that are to be stored for many weeks or months after opening should be stored in some type of container. Standard "ziplock" sandwich bags are not airtight, and your tobacco will dry out over time if they are used for storage. Similar bags designed for use in the freezer are better, but still aren't completely satisfactory for anything other than relatively short term storage. Some people advocate the use of multiple bags in a Tupperware container, "Mason" jars, or heat-sealed, vacuum-pack bags. All of these methods are satisfactory; however, I prefer to use bail-top jars with rubber gaskets.

If your tobacco is too moist, you can leave the container open slightly, while monitoring it closely. If your tobacco has dried out, it is usually possible to revive it. (There is a point beyond which no amount of re-moistening is going to restore the flavor of a tobacco, but that time span is generally measured in months or years.) Some advocate placing a slice of apple or potato in the tobacco container. This will work, but if left too long, you run the risk of introducing mold with this technique. Unlike cheese, the flavor of tobacco is not improved by mold, and once your container has been so contaminated, it is almost impossible to completely rid it of the mold spores that will attempt to infest any tobacco placed in that container in the future. A much safer method is to spray a tiny amount of water
into the container and reseal it for a day or two, or purchase a ceramic humidifying disk from your tobacconist and place it in the storage container.

2.4 How Do I "Break In" A Pipe?
The process of "breaking in" a pipe serves two functions. First, any saps, resins, acids, stains, demons, or other nasty things that have remained in the briar are driven out. Second, and most importantly, a "cake"--the layer of charred residue that builds up inside the bowl as tobacco is smoked in it--is developed. This cake protects the bowl of the pipe from the heat of burning tobacco and prevents it from "burning out." It should be noted that most of the information in this section applies to briar pipes only. Most other pipes require no break in period, or at most a very brief one. Additionally, one should not allow a cake to build up in a meerschaum or clay, as this could cause the bowl to crack.

It is important to smoke a new pipe slowly, to avoid damaging the naked briar. Some recommend that a new pipe be filled only one-third to one-half full for the first several smokes, after which the bowl can be filled a little more with each smoke. To be honest, this procedure is not necessary, but I always recommend it--and usually practice it--because it is all too easy to damage a new pipe through carelessness. Don't try to rush the break-in period, and don't be overly concerned if a new pipe has a bitter taste. Some pipes break in easier than others, and it is not uncommon for a pipe that is very difficult to break in to mature into a great smoker.

Some pipes are sold with a bowl coating designed to protect the briar until a cake is built up (sometimes such bowls are called "pre-carbonized"). Many pipes, however, are not so treated. While a "naked" bowl is not likely to be damaged so long as the pipe is smoked slowly, many people advocate preparing the bowl interior of a new pipe. Some recommend that the inside of the bowl be dampened with water to protect the briar, while others recommend honey, or a mixture of honey and water. Honey may help a cake form more quickly, but after trying all of these techniques I find that these days I tend to use nothing at all.

Finally, try not to smoke a new pipe outdoors if you can possibly avoid it. Even a gentle breeze will cause the pipe to burn much hotter than it would indoors, which can irreparably damage a briar that is not protected by a cake. I've never had a problem smoking my pipes outdoors (after they've been broken in, of course), but if you're concerned about possible damage, you can purchase wind caps from your tobacconist which will shield the burning tobacco from the effects of wind.

2.5 How Should I "Pack" My Pipe?
A pipe must be packed properly to ensure a good smoke; unfortunately, learning to do this takes time and practice. In fact, the art of packing a pipe is the most difficult task associated with pipe smoking, and this can be very frustrating for the beginner. I suspect that most people who have given up on trying to learn to smoke a pipe did so primarily because they couldn't master packing a bowl quickly enough to suit them.

The most common technique for packing a pipe is the "three layer" method. The objective is to end up with a bowl that is evenly packed from top to bottom; this is done by packing each layer progressively tighter. Trickle tobacco into the bowl until it is slightly overfull, then press very lightly with your finger until the bowl appears half full. Fill the pipe again and press down until the pipe is 2/3 to 3/4 full. Finally, overfill the pipe and press the top layer down fairly firmly. When finished the tobacco should feel "springy" to the touch. If it has no give at all, it's packed too tight. If a touch leaves an indentation, it is packed too loosely. Finally, test the "draw" by sucking air through the unlit pipe; the resistance should be about like that felt when sipping a soft drink through a straw. If the draw doesn't feel right, then empty the bowl and start over. A slightly different touch must be used depending on the size of the...
bowl and the cut and moisture level of the tobacco, but this will become second nature with experience. In fact, you will undoubtedly develop your own packing techniques with time, and you will find yourself loading your pipe without even thinking about it.

If you find yourself frustrated by the fact that you simply can't get the feel for packing your pipe, you might want to try a method suggested by Mike Butera. Mike recommends chopping the tobacco, reducing the ribbons into rectangles or squares about 1/4” long. The bowl is then packed as described above. Some people have found that this method can make the task of packing a bowl much easier.

2.6 How Should I Light My Pipe?
Barring such bizarre contraptions as parabolic mirrors, lasers, and miniature blowtorches, there are three ways to light your pipe: with a match, with a butane lighter, or with a fluid lighter (e.g. a "Zippo").

The wooden match is the traditional pipe lighting device. Strike the match and hold it for a second or two while the sulfur burns off. Bring the match to the tobacco surface and, while puffing gently, move the match around the tobacco in a slow, even circle.

Butane lighters are more convenient than matches, and, unlike fluid lighters, there is less risk of imparting an unpleasant taste to your tobacco. If you wish to use a butane lighter, then purchase one that is designed for pipes. Such lighters have an angled gas outlet that makes it easier to direct the flame into the bowl while avoiding burned fingers.

Fluid lighters share the convenience feature of butane, and they provide the only truly reliable means of lighting a pipe in a stiff wind. Zippo makes a lighter designed for pipes that has a circular hole in the chimney which is placed over the bowl while the flame is "sucked" into the tobacco. Other types of fluid lighters may be used as well, but their broad flame makes it all too easy to char the rim of the pipe bowl. The primary disadvantage to fluid lighters is that they can impart a slight taste to the tobacco. Some swear that this can be prevented if one merely waits a few seconds after igniting the lighter before lighting the tobacco. I can still taste (smell?) the lighter fluid, however, and I prefer my tobacco sans naphtha.

2.7 How Do I Keep My Pipe Lit?
Don't be overly concerned if you have difficulty keeping your pipe lit at first. It is not unusual for even experienced smokers to have to re-light several times, especially toward the bottom of the bowl. Try to relax and enjoy yourself--that is the whole point, after all. You'll find it much easier to keep your pipe lit with practice.

CHARRING LIGHT. The best way to keep your pipe lit is to light it correctly at the beginning. Most people light their pipe twice. Light the pipe as described above and puff a half dozen times or so. Then tamp the surface of the tobacco down with your pipe tool and re-light. The first lighting, often called the "charring light," will char the top of the tobacco and prepare this surface for the second lighting which will, with practice, take you through most of the bowl.

TAMPING. While smoking, ash residue will form at the top of the tobacco. This residue should be gently tamped down periodically during the course of a smoke and prior to re-lighting. This tamping serves to keep the tobacco--which expands as it burns--properly packed and promotes even burning. If the pipe has an especially tall bowl, the ash may sometimes become so thick that it is difficult to re-light the tobacco below it. If this occurs, loosen the ash gently with your pipe tool, dump the ash, tamp, and re-light.
SMOKING PACE. The pace at which you smoke (i.e. the rhythm at which you puff your pipe) is very important. With practice and experimentation you will achieve the perfect pace for you. The idea is to puff frequently enough to keep the tobacco lit, but not so frequently as to cause the pipe to burn too hot, which contributes to tongue bite and may damage your pipe. If you can't hold the bowl of your pipe comfortably in your hand, or if you can't hold the side of the bowl against your face for more than a few seconds, then you're smoking too fast. If this happens, set the pipe down for a few minutes to cool, then re-light and start again. Someone once described the perfect smoking pace as one where the pipe is always on the verge of going out.

2.8 How Should I Clean My Pipe?
Your pipe should be cleaned after each smoke. To do this, first let the pipe cool and then scoop or dump out any ash and "dottle" (unburned tobacco that sometimes remains in the bottom of the bowl). Do not bang the pipe against a hard surface, as this may result in a cracked shank or broken stem. If you must, hold the bowl of the pipe in one hand and strike the top of the bowl against the open palm of the opposite hand. Once the bowl is empty, run a pipe cleaner through the stem until it just enters the bowl and remove it. Repeat with additional cleaners until they come out clean (many people, myself included, will use both ends of a pipe cleaner before switching to a new one). Finally, take one of the used cleaners, bend it into a "U" shape, and wipe out the ash clinging to the sides of the bowl. [NOTE: Some people prefer to leave the ash in the bowl, believing that it promotes a good cake. If you like, try both ways and see what works best for you.] Set the pipe aside to dry completely. *Ideally*, the pipe should be allowed to "rest" for around 48 hours before smoking it again, but you might have to forgo this luxury until you have enough pipes to do so.

Periodically, you'll want to clean your pipe a bit more thoroughly. In addition to the steps above, you'll also want to carefully remove the stem from the shank and wipe out the "gunk" that collects in the mortise; a cotton swab (e.g. a "Q-tip") works well for this task. Some people also advocate periodic cleaning of the stem and shank with pipe cleaners soaked in alcohol (preferably some form of grain alcohol), particularly if the pipe begins to taste a bit musty or sour. Do not, however, get alcohol anywhere near the bowl of a meerschaum pipe.

CAUTION! PAY ATTENTION HERE!! Never, ever, ever take the stem out of a pipe while it is still hot. Allow the pipe to cool for at least an hour before attempting to remove the stem. [I'm of the opinion that you should let the pipe dry completely before removing the stem, as well.] Repeatedly removing the stem from a hot pipe will result in a loose stem at best, and you may even end up with a broken tenon or a cracked shank. With that said, there are pipes that are designed to have their stem removed while still hot. This sort of stem is called a "military bit" or an "army mount," since pipes such as these were originally designed for military men (I'm not being non-PC; there simply weren't any military women in those days), who might have need to stow their pipes on short notice. The stem's tenon on such a pipe is tapered to provide a friction fit, and the shank is almost always reinforced with a metal "cup" or band.

2.9 Why Is My Tongue "Charred"?
"Tongue bite," an intense burning sensation of the tongue, is an unpleasant side effect often experienced by the new pipe smoker (it is also experienced by non-newbies who take up the pipe again after a period of abstinence). While irritating, it will usually go away after a week or so of smoking. If you experience this problem for an extended period, then you may be smoking a tobacco that's too moist, you may have failed to pack the bowl properly, or you're smoking too fast. Some tongue bite sufferers have also experienced relief by using an oral rinse sold under the name "Biotene." It works for some; you might want to try it.
2.10 Why Is My Pipe "Gurgling"?
This is caused by moisture collecting in the bottom of the bowl and/or in the shank or stem. Possible causes of "gurgle" are:

Smoking too fast. Water vapor is a by-product of combustion, and rapid smoking will produce large amounts of it, which will then condense in the shank and stem.

Smoking a pipe that is not yet broken-in. I'm not certain if this occurs because the briar has not dried completely, because there is no cake, or "just because." Still, a new pipe will often smoke wet.

Smoking a tobacco that is too moist. This is self explanatory. In addition, some tobaccos, particularly aromatics, tend to leave more liquid residue than others.

Saliva in the pipe. Salivation is a normal response to smoking, and this saliva can collect in the stem. Keep your tongue away from the mouthpiece opening, and try to keep your mouth as dry as possible.

If your pipe begins to gurgle while smoking, run a pipe cleaner down the stem to absorb the moisture. This can be a bit tricky with some bent pipes, but it's usually possible if you put a small bend in the end of the cleaner and rotate it "just right."

Section 3. "Advanced" Topics.
This section addresses questions that may crop up once you have mastered the basics. If you have a question that you think should be added here, please let me know.

3.1 How Should I Ream My Pipe?
After a pipe has been smoked for a long time its cake may become so thick that it significantly reduces the capacity of the bowl. In very extreme cases, an overly thick cake may actually crack the bowl due to differential expansion. Ideally, the cake should not exceed one-sixteenth of an inch (about 1.5 mm) or so. When the cake exceeds this thickness, it should be carefully reamed. Some pipe tools have a blunt-pointed (to prevent gouging of the bowl bottom) knife blade for this purpose. While these will work, it is very easy to trim the cake unevenly or even inadvertently dig into bare wood. Numerous adjustable, multibladed reamers are available commercially, and these will do a much neater job. A favored tool for this task--suggested by pipe maker extraordinaire JT Cooke--is nothing more than a series of short wooden dowels of varying diameters that are wrapped with fine grit emery cloth or sandpaper. Whatever device you choose to use, work very slowly and carefully to prevent damage to your pipe. The idea is to gradually shave the cake down to the proper thickness, not to scrape it out in chunks. If you have more than the usual number of thumbs, you might want to take the pipe to your tobacconist, who will usually perform this task for a nominal fee.

3.2 What Can I Do When My Pipe "Turns Sour"?
A pipe, properly cared for, will probably outlast its owner. Occasionally, however, a pipe may begin to taste bitter or "sour." Sometimes this is caused by not allowing the pipe sufficient time to "rest" between smokes; other times, no cause can be determined with certainty. In any event, such a pipe can usually be rejuvenated by applying the "Professor's Pipe-Sweetening Treatment," publicized by Dennis Congos.
First, find some salt (non-iodized is preferred, but not essential), some alcohol (preferably "Everclear," or some other form of near-pure, non-denatured ethanol), and a place to rest your pipe in a semi-upright position. Insert a pipe cleaner into the stem of the pipe so that it extends into the shank. Fill the bowl to the rim with salt and drip or carefully pour alcohol into the bowl until the salt is just saturated. Try not to get any alcohol on the pipe's exterior, as this may damage the finish; any spills should be wiped up immediately. Leave the pipe alone for a day or two. After this time the salt will have turned brown from the absorption of "tars" from the bowl. Thoroughly clean all salt from the bowl and set the pipe aside overnight to dry completely. Your pipe will now be revitalized, and all traces of bitterness should be gone.

WARNING: Many people swear by this process, but the procedure is not risk-free. Some people have had pipes crack after this treatment, particularly when they allowed the salt and alcohol mixture to enter the pipe's shank and/or when they left the mixture in the pipe for several days. Any pipe with significant monetary or sentimental value should be sent to a professional pipe repairperson.

3.3 How Can I Fix A Loose Stem?

Even if you're careful to never remove the stem from a hot pipe, you may occasionally be faced with a loose stem. Often this problem will fix itself with time, but if the stem is so loose that it is in danger of falling out, then something must be done. The safest bet is to take the pipe to a tobacconist or send it to a repairperson. These people will have a great deal of practice performing this task, and they will do it for a very modest fee. It is remarkably easy for an amateur to crack a shank while attempting this repair, as many of us can sadly attest.

Nevertheless, if you are determined to do this yourself, you must first determine what sort of stem you have. If the stem is lucite, the easiest fix is to apply a very thin layer of clear nail polish to the tenon, allow this to dry *completely*, and then carefully sand the tenon to fit. A vulcanite stem, on the other hand, is a bit more complicated, as you will need to heat the tenon and expand it in some way. There are a number of variations to this procedure, but the most common one is described below.

First, remove the stem from the pipe and insert a pipe cleaner into the stem so that it just reaches the end of the tenon (this is to ensure that you don't collapse the air hole). Next, carefully heat the tenon over a match for about five seconds (the intent is to soften the vulcanite, not melt it). Then gently press the end of the tenon against a flat surface, keeping the tenon as perpendicular to the surface as possible, taking care not bend the tenon to one side or the other. After the stem has cooled, test fit it. If the stem is still too loose, repeat this procedure. If it is now too tight, then see "What should I do with a stem that's too tight?" below. NOTE: It is *very* easy to ruin a perfectly good pipe with this technique, and I feel I should reiterate my earlier statement that this job is best undertaken by a "professional."

A less radical (and *much* safer) procedure that has been recommended to me by several people is to simply rub the stem's tenon against a block of beeswax until the tenon is well coated. Once this is complete, reinset the stem. I am told that the joint will tighten after a smoke or two.

3.4 What Should I Do With A Stem That's Too Tight?

If the stem is still inserted in the pipe and is so difficult to remove that you fear your pipe may be damaged, then place the pipe in the freezer for several minutes. This works the vast majority of the time; however, if the stem still proves too difficult to remove, smoke the pipe, allow it to cool, and try to remove the stem again. If neither of these techniques work, then send the pipe to a reputable repairperson.
If you do manage to remove the stem, place some sort of dry lubricant, such as graphite (from a soft pencil) or wax, on the tenon and attempt to reinsert the stem. If this does not provide satisfactory results, you will need to remove a small amount of material from the tenon. Wrap some very fine (400 grit or so) sandpaper or some "O" or finer grade steel wool around the tenon and twist the stem gently. Work very slowly and carefully, and check the fit frequently until it is satisfactory.

3.5 How Should I Polish My Stems?
Vulcanite stems can oxidize, turning a disgusting brownish green color. This is one case where "an ounce of prevention" definitely pays off. Avoid exposing vulcanite stems to direct sunlight whenever possible, and wipe off your stems after each use. When oxidation does begin to form, it can often be removed with a mild abrasive, such as baking soda or toothpaste. If the oxidation is too severe for this treatment, jeweler's rouge or an automobile rubbing compound will often do the trick. For truly stubborn stems more drastic measures may be required. An overnight soak in household bleach will turn your stems black again, but you should be careful to cover any stem logos with a blob of petroleum jelly to protect them prior to soaking, and you should be prepared to apply some elbow grease to polish the stem surface, which will be roughened by this treatment.

Professionals (and "serious amateurs") remove oxidation with a buffing wheel loaded with Tripoli or some similar abrasive and then apply carnuba wax to protect the stem and bring out a high shine. If you wish to use a buffing rig, consult with someone experienced in such matters. It's all too easy to burn a stem on a buffing wheel running at excessively high speed or, for that matter, to catapult a briar into your face.

3.6 How Should I Care For My Meerschaum?
First, and most importantly, don't drop it. Meerschaum is fragile, and it is very unlikely that your pipe will survive a dive to the kitchen floor. Second, do not allow a cake to build in the bowl (firmly swabbing out all the ash residue with a bent pipe cleaner after each smoke should do the trick). If your pipe does start to build a cake, then ream it out very carefully. Third, if your pipe has a screw-in shank fitting (as most meerschaums do), twist the stem clockwise while removing it; twisting counter-clockwise could unscrew the fitting, and doing so repeatedly can strip the shank threads. Finally, meerschaum is a very absorbent, inorganic material, and does not require the same "rest period" that briars do. Still, I would at least allow the pipe to cool and dry completely before loading up and smoking it again.

Many meerschaum aficionados claim that to insure proper "coloring" of the bowl you should never hold the bowl with your bare hands while smoking. This may be true, but I would much rather have a meerschaum with an unevenly colored bowl than to have to go through the hassle of holding my pipe by the stem or (horrors!) wearing kid gloves to smoke.

3.7 Why Do People Buy Expensive Pipes?
Good question. Will a $500 pipe smoke 10 times better than a $50 pipe? Probably not. Does this mean the $500 pipe is a "poor value"? Not necessarily.

Like most things in life, you generally get what you pay for when you buy a pipe. A number of factors contribute to the price of a pipe, not the least of which is the amount of time and energy expended in its production. A machine can crank out a pipe in less than a minute, but a craftsman may spend a day or more carving a single pipe, and such a
pipe is as much a work of art as it is a smoking instrument. Smoking these sculptures in briar can provide tremendous pleasure, and many people are willing to pay for the privilege.

On the other hand, many people are perfectly content to smoke so-called "cheap" pipes. These people think that spending a large sum of money on a hunk of wood that serves only to hold burning tobacco is irresponsible, foolish, or both. These people do have a point, as it is certainly possible to buy an inexpensive, machine-made pipe that smokes perfectly well.

Like so many other aspects in this hobby, it all boils down to personal preference. The important thing is to smoke what you like, and don't get your nose out of joint if someone else's tastes differ from yours.

3.8 Is Pipe Smoking Bad For Me?
Probably. How bad? The jury's still out. Pipe smoking is certainly the safest form of tobacco use (with the possible exception of nasal snuff). In fact, a review of the literature has led me to believe that the risks are, for the most part, negligible, so long as one smokes in moderation and does not inhale. This is not to say that pipe smoking won't kill you, but it's less likely to do so than your automobile. I must note that at least one study (the United States Surgeon General's Report on Cigarette Smoking, 1964) found that pipe smokers live *longer* than non-smokers. If this is true, I'm sure it's because pipe smoking reduces stress, and because pipe smokers spend so much time fiddling with their pipes that they have little time to participate in more hazardous activities. Still, if you have a strong desire to live forever, I suggest you forgo pipe smoking (and fried foods, and red meat, breathing, etc.).

3.9 Should I Store My Pipe With A Cleaner In The Stem?
There are three schools of thought on this issue:

1) Those who do not leave a pipe cleaner in their pipe between smokes. These people believe that doing so prevent their pipe from drying quickly and or properly.

2) Those who do leave a pipe cleaner in their pipe between smokes. These people believe that doing so assists in the absorption of nasty stuff.

3) Those who compromise by leaving a pipe cleaner in their pipe for a short period (usually overnight), then removing it to allow the pipe to dry completely.

Personally, I belong to group #1 about half the time. The rest of the time I'm a #3, unless I forget to remove the pipe cleaner, in which case I'm an accidental #2. Bottom line: It really doesn't matter. Whatever works for you is fine.

3.10 How Do I Smoke "Flake Tobaccos"?
Flake tobaccos are those that have been pressed during processing into a rectangular cake and then (usually after an aging period) sliced into shingle-like "flakes" about a millimeter or so in thickness. Most flake tobaccos are straight Virginias. Variations on this theme include "sliced plug" (typically a flavored burley), "cut cake," "roll cut" (which is spun into a sort of rope before being sliced into discs, and which often has perique added to the base Virginias), as well as "plugs" and "twists" (which are sliced by the consumer after purchase).

Most flake tobaccos and their kin should be prepared prior to smoking; this process is known as "rubbing out" the tobacco. The traditional technique for doing this is to place the number of flakes sufficient to fill the pipe in the palm
of one hand; then rub both palms together over a cloth or a sheet of paper. An alternate technique is to pinch the flakes apart with the fingertips; I usually use a combination of these two methods to reduce the flakes to the proper consistency. The degree to which the flakes are rubbed out will determine the tobacco's burning characteristics and taste. The more the flake is rubbed out, the faster and easier the tobacco will burn. If you tend to smoke overly fast, or if you intend to smoke outdoors, you might wish to rub the flakes out less. As with most things related to pipe smoking, the key is practice and experience.

3.11 Does Tobacco Improve With Age?
The answer is a qualified "yes." The stuff you'll find in your local supermarket is not likely to age well, but high quality natural blends, like good wines, will change with age, usually for the better. Virginias are most noted for their tendency to improve over time, becoming darker, sweeter and more full-bodied, but other sorts of blends often show marked improvement as well. A "fresh" blend will often have a harsh edge, and the tastes of each of its component tobaccos will stand out sharply. After aging for a few years, however, the blend will have a much softer quality, and the flavors of its components will have "wed," producing a much more smooth, richer tobacco.

Many pipe smokers set aside tins of their favorite blends to age, dipping into their "cellars" from time to time to sample and evaluate the blends as they change. It is also common for a smoker to place into storage blends that he or she has purchased but did not enjoy, in the hopes that they will improve with time. While this practice does take a bit of patience, the rewards are almost always worth it.

Storing tobacco in unopened tins is a relatively simple matter; just put the tins in a relatively cool, dry place, such as a closet. Storing bulk blends or opened tins for long periods of time can be more of a challenge. Most people recommend placing the tobacco into sealed "Mason" jars or in hermetically sealed, non-porous plastic bags (using one of those contraptions designed for vacuum-sealing foods that you occasionally see for sale in department stores). Reports indicate that either technique is satisfactory.

3.12 How Many Pipes Do I Need?
There is obviously no single answer to this question. Many pipe smokers will tell you that you can't have too many pipes. They are, of course, correct, and most pipe smokers will continue to add to their collections through the years. Still, what is the practical minimum number of pipes required?

The number of pipes you need depends on your smoking habits and the type of tobacco you prefer. In general, however, I am of the opinion that you will eventually need about one pipe for each bowl of tobacco you smoke in a week. This figure was determined by a completely unscientific experiment.

"The frequency with which I smoke varies, but during this experiment I smoked about nine bowls a week. I attempted to smoke for a month using only four pipes. This would allow each pipe to rest for at least 48 hours before being smoked again. I did not take particularly good care of these pipes; in fact, I smoked much more aggressively and kept my tobacco more moist than usual. After two or three weeks, the pipes began to taste a bit "off," indicating that they were being smoked too frequently. Increasing the number of pipes to eight fixed the problem. It appears that a good quality pipe may, with minimal care, be smoked once a week virtually indefinitely without ill effects. Your mileage will almost certainly vary. If you smoke slowly and take good care of your pipes you can undoubtedly get by with a much smaller collection."

The problem with having only a minimal number of pipes is that you risk getting locked into a rigid, anal-retentive, "if-it's-Tuesday-it-must-be-Savinelli" rotation scheme. With a larger collection, you can smoke your pipes as the
mood strikes you without fear of oversmoking any of them. Of course, you'll also want a few pipes for outdoor activities, and you'll want a few more that fit comfortably in a pocket for nights on the town, a few really large pipes for reading or television watching, etc. As they say, you really can't have too many pipes.

3.13 Can I Make My Own Pipes?
Of course you can. In fact, many people do. Some smokers buy "kits" with pre-drilled bowls and ready-made stems that they shape and finish; others prefer to produce their pipes "from scratch." The details of how to make a pipe are beyond the scope of this FAQ, but here are two sources of pipemaking supplies and information that can help you get started.

Section 4. Pipe Resources On The 'Net.
There are many sources for information on pipes and pipe smoking on the Internet, and more are popping up all the time. The two listed below will get you to all the rest.

Steve Masticola's "Pipes Digest" is a mailing list that is a "must-read" for every smoking 'Netizen. Send a message to "pipes@pipes.org" and tell Steve that you'd like to subscribe. [FYI, Steve Masticola is the creator of "alt.smokers.pipes."]

Steve Beaty's "Pipes WWW Page" is the ultimate online resource for the pipe smoker. From here, you can subscribe to Pipes Digest, peruse back issues of PD, or use a very efficient search engine to find topics of interest. There are also links to just about everything on the Internet related to pipes and pipe smoking:

http://www.pipes.org

ASP also has its own home page, where you can find a wealth of information, including FAQ's, bio's, classic posts, merchant links, an extensive shapes chart, and much more:

http://www.aspipes.org/

Section 5. Acknowledgments, Etc.
Thanks to Sami Mikhail, who wrote the first version of this FAQ, and to Mike Gillman, Jeff Folloder, and Ian Rastall, who revised it and later handed it off to me. I only hope I haven't butchered it too badly.

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I have not re-edited this eight-year-old FAQ, but rather added this short introduction. At the outset I should tell you that there have always been a few who have been put off by the detail of this little FAQ that I wrote about eight years ago. By way of apology, I am a craftsman: a jeweler and luthier as well as an amateur home machinist. Considering that it takes over 200 hours to build an acoustic guitar, I'm used to the kind of slow, fastidious work that produces a near-perfect result. I'm also the kind of guy that tediously details his car -- and have been doing so since I bought my first electric buffer back in the 70s.

Don't, however, let the amount of detail in this FAQ scare you off; while this FAQ can teach you how to produce that "wet-look" shine, there is no necessity for you to do so -- the reason for the detail is that you should know how to accomplish it even if you're not going to use it. My advice is, after you have read this FAQ, and familiarized yourself with the techniques, decide what level of detail is appropriate for you and go only that far.

When I first wrote this FAQ, the Chinese buffers that were available were of poor quality: shafts that were out-of-round and bearings that were questionable. In the ensuing years that has changed; and while a Chinese buffer will never be as good as a Foredom or a Baldor (which are industrial-quality, ball bearing machines with precision-machined shafts), they are certainly serviceable as long as one remembers not to use them on sharply-defined edges: the wobble in the shaft will produce some distortion. My buffer of choice is still the Foredom: a precision buffer with an infinitely-adjustable speed control, that is the standard in the jewelry industry, and will last you for a lifetime; likewise I still recommend the same polishing compounds that I did eight years ago.

In the ensuing years since I first wrote this, micro-abrasive abrasive sheets have become much more readily available, being sold that many Home Depot and other large hardware stores. In addition, 3M Imperial Lapping Film Sheets, (mylar-backed abrasive sheets), manufactured down to 1/2 micron can now be purchased online or in some of the same stores.

Throughout the FAQ I mention specific products or vendors; let me state clearly that I have no financial connection whatsoever with them. I am simply a satisfied customer and they are products and vendors that I have used and found to be most satisfactory and highly recommend.
So in conclusion, please remember that while you should review this FAQ so as to learn the steps necessary to produce an "wet-look" finish, you do not necessarily have to produce one: you can stop at the point when you find the shine pleasing to you!

_Serge Dasara, March, 2010_

1. **BUFFING AND POLISHING**

1.1. This FAQ discusses the tools and methods for polishing and restoring briar pipes and their stems: vulcanite or acrylic. The same methods are used for removing small scratches from the briar bowl as well as restoring the shiny black surface to stems suffering from varying degrees of oxidation (which produces a dull surface, tinged with brown or green as the oxidation deepens).

1.2. I’ve written this FAQ for those who have little or no experience in machine buffing and/or using micro-abrasives, and the techniques presented are aimed at this audience. Further the information provided in this FAQ is based upon my personal experience as well as from what I have learned from working both in the jewelry industry and as a luthier. This FAQ is not intended to be the definitive work on the subject, but rather a helpful guide for pipe smokers who want to learn how to buff and polish their pipes.

1.3. By way of background, I first used a buffer/polisher over 50 years ago, having been trained as a jewelry fabricator and watchmaker, then as a luthier (guitar-maker); and although I do not work in either field today, both have been serious hobbies/side-businesses.

2. **FOR THE BEGINNER**

2.1. I’d like to make a few points at the outset, and separate them from the rest of the text so that they are neither lost nor overlooked. These points address the most common mistakes that I see beginners make.

2.1.1. **WHAT BUFFER?** Without mincing words, I recommend the Foredom BL-1; it will be a tool that you can use for life; it is small and compact; it has infinitely variable speed; and it is well made. You can slow it down for your first work sessions, and gradually speed it up as you become more comfortable with the tool and the process. It is the buffer of choice for the jewelry industry – hundreds of thousands of them are in use today polishing rings, earrings, pendants and the like in thousands of jewelry factories around the world.
2.1.2. WORK SAFELY. No loose clothing, no ties. Roll up your sleeves. Remove jewelry and watches. Wear a heavy apron that covers your chest to protect you from work that may be flung from your hands and shot into your chest at high speed. Wear safety glasses. And get a good cartridge respirator; one made of soft rubber that completely encloses your nose and mouth and uses “filter cartridges”. You do NOT want to inhale minute pieces of cotton, abrasive, vulcanite and the like; those paper nose-cones held on with a rubber band are next to useless. I suggest the 22R20.01 (available by head size as .01, .02 and .03) from Lee Valley at: http://www.leevalley.com. If you can afford it, get a ventilated hood for your buffer; if you can’t afford one, study the photos of them on various web-sites, then at a Home Depot or Lowes find pre-made sheet-metal parts in their HVAC section that look like a hood, and cobble one together with a short length of pipe to mate to your shop vacuum. You now have a poor man’s ventilated hood. Ready made or home made, line it with ½ inch foam: it will absorb the shock of the work that will inevitably be snatched from your hands by the spinning wheel. Move all other tools, pipes and other loose objects off of the bench top. Remember the speed of the wheel: anything it catches will be hurled at YOU at that speed. Be wary, work safely!

2.1.3. BUFF SLOWLY. One of the most common errors of the beginner is “accidentally” removing too much of the material being polished: edges and contours are flattened, stamped or engraved lettering is removed and the like. Use a small wheel (four inch diameter), and read – then re-read - the section on how to calculate the designated speed for these operations: Surface Feet Per Minute. The ideal speed for a beginner is 750 to 1000 SFPM: you will not easily remove edges and contours or remove stock at this slow speed; yes, it will take you a while to buff a pipe with a slow-turning motor, but a nice crisp edge or a button can be flattened in a split-second at higher speeds, so why not take your time?

2.1.4. LET THE WHEEL DO THE WORK. Or more realistically, the outer 3/16 or so of the wheel (the “loose” threads on the surface) is what is doing the work. Don’t push or - worse yet - lean into the wheel: you only need to press the workpiece to the depth of the loose threads, never any deeper. It is these threads that “catch” the polishing compound, and which are “brushed” over the surface of the work that does the polishing. You should never be slowing the motor down with pressure; You should never be distorting the wheel with pressure.

2.1.5. KEEP THE WORKPIECE MOVING. Never stop while it is in contact with the wheel. Shall I say it again? If you do not, you will end up with a wavy surface or ruts.
2.1.6. BUY HIGH-QUALITY COMPOUNDS. You use so little, buy the best, either from jewelry or machine-shop suppliers or the like. Avoid the stuff you can get in home-supply mega-stores or hardware stores; they are generally made for less-demanding applications (such as chrome-plating industrial fixtures) and rarely produce as good of a finish as those made for the jewelry, optical or show-car industries.

2.1.7. Practice on a junker pipe if this is your first time using a power buffer. You’d be surprised at how easy it is to create a wavy surface or remove edges, contours and buttons!

3. OVERVIEW

3.1. The polishing process requires that the surface be repeatedly abraded with finer and finer grits of abrasives until the subsequent scratches are so fine that they appear non-existent. This is the crux of this FAQ, and I will repeat it many times in many ways – it’s that important!

3.1.1. Removing scratches with an abrasive compound on a wheel (on a buffer) is called "cut" or "polish", while removing smaller scratches with a wheel (generally, 2.5 micron abrasives and smaller) is called "color" or "buff", and is the step to get a smooth, bright, high luster final finish. (It is called "color" since the color of the compound will affect the finished color of fine metals such as hi-carat gold or platinum). Obviously, there will be some overlap of compounds and processes, and it is up to the operator to choose where to start, how large of a step to take between compounds, and when to stop: e.g. there is no need polish a pipe stem using the micro-abrasives used to polish an eyeglass lens.

3.2. ABRASIVES

3.2.1. Abrasives can be found in many forms, shapes and hardnesses but the two forms we will discuss are either glued (to a paper or Mylar film backing) or mixed with a sterate (wax), then packed in a bar or tube as a soft solid. The latter are generally referred to as "compounds" and are applied to a spinning cotton buffing wheel. Some abrasives - particularly those found in nature as minerals - possess a quality referred to as "friability", which means that they continue to break apart, constantly exposing fresh cutting surfaces that are smaller and smaller, somewhat accomplishing cut and color in one operation. Some of the most common abrasives are the natural ones such as: emery, Tripoli, diamond or rouge; and the man-made, such as: silicon oxide, aluminum oxide and silicone carbide. All of these abrasives have advantages and disadvantages, and the most important difference is the particle size. In natural abrasives (such as
Tripoli and Rouge), particle size can vary considerably in a given batch; consequently, it is most important that the particles be “sieved” and separated into batches of a uniform particle size before they are glued to a backing or compressed into a bar; how carefully and uniformly this is done impacts the cost of a given compound. Always buy the best is my advice.

3.2.2. Synthetic particles tend to have a more uniform hardness and shape which allows them to be sized more accurately than natural abrasives. It is important to note that sieve sizes between different measuring standards vary. Consequently, an abrasive with a 400 FEPA sieve, may not be the same as a 400 ASTM sieve size. In addition, other abrasives, (film or compound) are sold by sizes expressed in "microns". One micron is a metric unit of length equal to one millionth of a meter and is approximately equivalent to a 14,000 sieve size. A one-micron finish will produce a very nice finish luster. One of the better products on the market for buffing stems is the white compound sold under the proprietary name of FABULUSTER; it is very uniform in particle size - in addition, it is a friable compound.

3.3. PAPER AND MYLAR SHEETS

3.3.1. Abrasive papers or films can be purchased in grits from 1000 to .3 micron (+/- 20,000), but for our purposes we will use sheets from 600 to 8000, although it is good to have up to 12,000 on hand. For finer polishing, we will use the polisher/buffer, and anything rougher is outside of the scope of this article and in the realm of woodworking. For ease of use, these micro-abrasive sheets are best used by gluing them to a stiff foam block with contact cement. Many hi-tech auto-body shops sell these abrasive papers and films, as do machine shop suppliers, and hobby shops sell the MICRO-MESH brand, which I recommend. Micro-Mesh sells the "Craft Kit" which is comprised of two-inch square foam pads as well as one-inch by six-inch foam paddles (both are 1/4 inch thick) to which their abrasive films have been pre-glued. Micro-Mesh also sells loose sheets, and various sizes of foam blocks. I have found that the closed-cell foam insulation strips (about one inch square and three feet long) which are sold for insulating around window air conditioners make excellent sanding blocks. Simply cut off a 3 or 4 inch piece, and use contact cement to glue the sandpaper/film to one surface of the "block". Beauty supply shops sell similar products in the nail section. The problem is that the grit size is rarely marked, and often incorrectly marked. However, once the reader is familiar with the "feel" of the Micro-Mesh products, it is easy to sort thru these "nail buffers" so as to find ones suitable for pipe polishing.

3.4. SOLID AND SEMI-SOLID COMPOUNDS
3.4.1. There are many different polishing and buffing compounds. Often manufacturers - or worse yet, distributors - separate them into additional categories with 3 or 4 different levels of polishing and buffing. The nomenclature becomes more complicated because the compounds are used for different reasons by different industries depending upon the desired outcome and the surface itself - not to mention the time one wishes to invest in a project. For example, the optical and custom/show car industries will use the same types of abrasives in different packaging, yet the resulting finishes are often remarkably alike.

3.4.2. One of the difficulties in using and understanding abrasive compounds is that each manufacturer uses their own formulation in manufacturing a line of polishing abrasives. For example, there are two types of aluminum oxide used as a polish, sometimes called "A" and "B", and the size of the particle of each designation is quite different: Aluminum oxide "A" is 0.3 micron in size and Aluminum oxide "B" is an extremely small micron size of 0.05. To put this into perspective, 50,000 sieve is +/- .5 micron. A micron is a metric unit of length equal to one millionth of a meter.

3.4.3. Another difficulty is how carefully each manufacturer screens the abrasive that makes up a compound. Some manufacturers will sell a bar or tube of compound that is comprised of (for example) only 3 micron abrasives, while another manufacturer may have a “range” of particles from 2 to 5 microns in their compound, with the “average” being 3 microns. This is a very important distinction, because you will obtain a much finer finish with the former. Let the buyer beware.

3.4.4. When purchasing a bar of abrasive compound, the color alone will not reveal the concentration of abrasive compound used or the size of the particle used in manufacturing the compound. The ranges of abrasives used by one manufacturer in their green oxide compounds used is from 5% to 90%, a significant difference; and of course, the resulting finish from each bar will be significantly different. And too, there is no accepted color code to abrasives; it is simply a myth that one color is used prior to or after another color, so let me repeat: there is no system of color-coding for abrasives! I have seen “black rouge” for sale that is not rouge at all but emery, and would remove rust from steel! These variables can vary greatly from manufacturer to manufacturer. I would suggest finding and staying with one supplier when selecting your abrasives.

3.4.4.1. Unfortunately this can cause unpredictable results, and make the purchase of compounds difficult. Buying at tool shows, hardware stores, flea markets and the like is risky, IMO: I have seen bars of red
compound that are 800 to 1000 grit and sold as jewelers rouge, stating that it is "suitable for use on precious metals". That product would damage high-carat gold or fine plastic in a fraction of a second.

3.4.5. To add to the confusion, different suppliers describe buffing and polishing compounds differently and many different brands are identical for all intents and purposes. Not all red compounds are jeweler's rouge, as many believe. Jeweler's rouge is made with ferric oxide, which gives it the red color. The word "rouge", is French for "red", and even though it is then semantically incorrect to call green or white polishing compound rouge, some do it anyway. As a final note, also remember that a bar of green compound is more than likely chrome oxide, and not rouge!

3.4.6. Practically speaking, I can tell you that the Tripoli that I use is the equivalent of +/- 7000 sieve and the rouge that I use is slightly finer than 1 micron (keep in mind that they are both friable, and break down to smaller and smaller particles as one buffs). Both, however are sold in unmarked wrappings, and your finding the same ones that I buy is highly unlikely. Before we get too caught up in sizing abrasives, please remember that it is extremely difficult to sieve particles finer than 12,000, and that methods other than a sieve are used to sort micro-abrasives. Further, the smaller the particle, the more difficult it becomes to assign a micron size to a corresponding sieve size and vice-versa; there are no true equivalents between micron and particle sizes, just “educated guesses”; consequently, when I speak of an equivalence between a sieved particle and a particle measured in microns, it is just that: an educated guess.

3.4.7. TIP: HOW TO JUDGE ABRASIVE SIZE. Now that you are aware of the fact that a given bar of compound marked “Tripoli” may be comprised of abrasive particles finer than another manufacturer’s bar of “Rouge”, you will want to be able to judge the relative size of the abrasives in any given compound for yourself. Let me give you a tip. You will need a one-inch by two-inch piece of sterling silver, 10 or 12 gauge; you can buy it at any lapidary or jewelry supply shop. On a large piece of plate glass (a glass table works well) lay a sheet of suitable abrasive: if you want to test rouge, use a sheet of 3M Imperial 1-micron lapping film (+/- 14,000) or Micro-Mesh 12,000. Using a continuous supply of water, lap the silver back and forth over the abrasive sheet until you have a flat, even surface. You now have a test piece with a know surface finish. Using a high quality masking tape, mask off ½ of the piece of silver, pressing down with your fingernail so that you have a tight, straight edge. Charge a clean, new wheel with the abrasive you are testing, and polish the exposed surface of the silver. Now remove the abrasive from the silver with soap and hot water, peel off the masking tape, and using a 25X loupe or magnifier, examine the silver
closely in a strong light. You will immediately be able to tell if the compound on the wheel is finer or coarser than the previously prepared surface. By a process of elimination, you will be able to number all of your compounds, and if you stay with one manufacturer, you will never have to repeat this experiment! (We use glass as a flat surface, inasmuch as it is the flattest surface available except for specially ground stone "flats" made by Starrett; sterling – though expensive – is soft enough to lap and polish quickly, and that piece should last for years).

3.5. Some recommendations. Let me give you two source of quality supplies such as wheels and compounds, who sells jewelry tools and supplies commercially: [http://www.foredom.com](http://www.foredom.com). I have no affiliation with either except as a customer, but I can assure you that they sell high quality supplies to the jewelry and gunsmith industries. Foredom’s rouge, #40041 is one of the best sold, and their Tripoli is quite good also. Their wheels are excellent. For the stems, I suggest FABULUSTER, though WHITE DIAMOND (two grades are available) and ZAM are similar. I prefer FABULUSTER, and in a pinch it can be used for fine metals and other hard materials. Another source of supplies is: [http://www.kingsleynorth.com/jewelers.html](http://www.kingsleynorth.com/jewelers.html) [for buffing compounds, click on "Polishing Compounds" which will take you to that page] who sells both VIGOR and GROBET polishing compounds as well as Fabulustre, (two excellent ones) and all of the other supplies mentioned here.

3.5.1. For those who wish to go the extra mile, many micro-abrasives are available to the show-car industry as well as the optical industry. The abrasives used on plastic eye-glass lenses are as fine as .03 micron – try that on your tamper or fountain pen! I have asked my optometrist to buy .03 micron compound from his lab for me, and he has; you can do the same. It is supplied as a slurry, and I have found a foam sponge to be the best medium for its application. The shine is spectacular!

4. WHEELS AND MOTORS

4.1. Buffing wheels come in a variety of styles and sizes. With the standard polishing motor, the smallest buff possible should be used to obtain the optimum working speed. Choices should be confined to the stitched buffs, either treated or non-treated. The unstitched buffs generally lack the stiffness to generate sufficient friction at the interface to allow the surface to flow and fill in the micro-scratches necessary to yield a high luster. A separate category of buffing wheels are hard felt "bobs". These are used to maintain a perfectly flat surface, or perfectly sharp edge or contour, since they do not "give" as the workpiece is applied to its surface. In addition, complex or inside curves can be easily polished by shaping the hard felt wheel to the exact shape or contour of the inner curve. Be advised, however, that one can ONLY use hard felt bobs
with a "polishing lathe" as described below, never on a home-made buffer or an Asian one; and the technique and control needed requires a LOT of skill and practice, so practice with a felt bob on old pipe stems! If you have no local supplier, Foredom and Kingsley North sell a complete line of polishing wheels.

4.2. A buffer/polisher can be made from a double spindled motor but at about this price point one might as well buy a proper polishing lathe manufactured for the dental, jewelry or optical industry. Such a buffer should ideally be of sealed construction and have a precision ground motor shaft, turning on self lubricating ball or needle bearings. They are called polishing “lathes” because they are made to extremely close tolerances, with a precision ground motor spindle, turning on needle or ball bearings, with microscopic run-out. What this means is that as the motor turns, the buffing wheel will (once trued) turn accurately and concentrically to the center of the spindle. Wavy surfaces and the loss of edges and contours on the workpiece are a result (if not of operator error or inexperience) of wobble and run-out from an inexpensive buffing set-up as described in the next paragraph - as the wheel wobbles - even if only by hundredths of an inch - it causes the ripples and waves, and makes it impossible to maintain a crisp edge. And all Asian buffers and home made equipment have a LOT of run-out! Again, let the buyer beware.

4.3. One can also purchase an inexpensive grinding unit made in Asia from companies such as Homier or Harbor Freight Salvage. Such grinders can usually be bought locally for between fifty and one-hundred dollars. One may also rig up various arrangements of pulleys and belts with a discarded washing machine motor or a similar motor. I really discourage the use of either. First, a grinder’s motor is not the same as the motor made for a polisher/buffer in that a grinder is a high torque, and generally high rotation motor designed for removing large amounts of material quickly; neither is a washing-machine motor made for spinning a buff. The quick removal of stock is not the purpose of a buffer, and buffers generally have much less torque and a bit less horsepower. It is that unnecessary torque that will fling the pipe that much further (or break your finger) that much more quickly. Avoid them. In addition, the Asian units have a great deal of run-out because they are not precision-made, and turn on inexpensive bronze bushings in place of bearings. This introduces a great deal of off-center wobble, and can cause surface ripples in the finished work – so that one can not easily maintain a sharp edge or contour with a machine like these. As for the home-brewed machines, IMO, they are just plain dangerous in addition to being difficult to work with and have all of the faults of the cheap, Asian machines. Or let me put it this way: you wouldn't stick a soda-straw into a walnut shell to use for a pipe - would you? Then why maintain and restore fine pipes with a jury-rigged outfit?
4.4. The three most popular polishing lathes are (in descending order of power and size): Baldor, Red Wing and Foredom; the Baldor lists for about $325; the Red Wing about $289 and the Fordeom about $199. The internet prices are lower, but not by a lot inasmuch as these buffer/polishers are designed for industrial use and purchase. I own one of each, but will tell you that the Foredom BL-1 will be just perfect for home maintenance and restoration of smoking pipes - it can be had for about $175.00.

4.5. DREMEL. In a word: NO! Don't even think of using one on a pipe! They spin way, way too fast (15,000 RPM) and that little buff concentrates a lot of power on a very small surface. It has sharp edges and can run away from you and nick and gouge the workpiece before you can recover control. The Dremel was not made for buffing a pipe, and you can do a lot of damage with it in a very short time. They are very good tools and quite useful; I own two, but not for buffing and polishing!

4.6. Be certain that you purchase an appropriate tapered arbor (right or left hand) for the direction of rotation of the spindle for the buffer you use. If you get a tapered arbor from a machinists supply, be forewarned that it will run less accurately than a narrower jeweler's tapered arbor because it has a very wide taper and so can be used with lower priced buffs from the hardware store which have a large center hole. Jeweler's buffs are purchased from a jeweler supplier and are made with a smaller hole; they are more expensive, and require a smaller jeweler's tapered arbor. They are also more accurately cut, and give a finer finish. Foredom and Kingsley North sell jeweler's buffs: for Tripoli, I use a coarse-weave (60 tpi), four-inch diameter muslin buff with three rows of stitching (though some prefer the even stiffer yellow-treated buffs); for FABULUSTER and for carnauba wax, I use a fine-weave (80 tpi), four-inch diameter muslin buff with three rows of stitching. For the final buff (using no wax or compound on the wheel) a loose-stitched (usually 1 row) flannel or even a man-made chamois buff, turning at a low speed (under 1000 sfpm).

5. USING COMPOUNDS ON WHEELS

SPEED. You can improve the effectiveness of the polishing operation by operating in the optimum working speed range for the grit being used. This is measured in distance over time and is always expressed as SFPM, or "surface feet per minute". This is the speed that the outer surface of the wheel is turning at, and NOT the spindle speed – and this is an extremely important distinction! To obtain the SFPM, the formula is: spindle speed x diameter of buff x π/12 = SFPM. For an automated calculation of SFPM, go to: http://www.carbidedepot.com/formulas-turning.htm

5.1.1. For example, the optimum working speed for Tripoli is 1500 to 2000 SFPM, and a 4 inch wheel turning at 1725 RPM spindle speed will produce
the optimal speed on the surface of the wheel. I use and recommend a four inch wheel; larger wheels simply produce an excessive surface speed that is dangerous to the operator and material, and one has less control with a larger wheel. Trust me when I tell you that 8-inch wheels can break fingers as well as propel a stem into your chest or a bystander at a high rate of speed. I have seen photos of European pipe-makers using giant wheels on huge, slow-turning motors. I simply do not understand why, and attribute it to custom or unavailability of the buffers sold in the U.S. I have used such set-ups to buff guitars, and know that Gibson uses them on its production lines; but in my opinion, that are unsuitable for a small object such as a pipe, and it would be too easy for it to be snatched out of your hand and propelled into a wall, or worse yet, you! Stick with a 4 inch wheel!

5.1.2. I would suggest working at 750 to 1000 SFPM, and that would be with the dial at about 1/3 on a Foredom polishing lathe. Yes, it is slow, but at that speed bad things happen slowly, and you can sometimes recover from a mistake that you could not were the motor turning faster. In addition, you will be less likely to buff off too much stock, or stamped lettering at that speed. Once your confidence and skill level increase, you can speed up.

5.2. One step that should never be overlooked in polishing is the necessity of cleaning the coarser compound from the piece prior to moving to a finer one. Cross-contamination is one of the biggest problems encountered during the polishing process. If the binder of an abrasive is allowed to overheat it can plasticize and smear over the piece. If this material is not removed prior to moving on to the next finer step, the heat and action produced by the subsequent operation can liberate the coarser abrasive and intermix it with the finer one. A quick wipe with a cotton pad lightly dampened with alcohol works well. And it goes without saying that you should use one wheel - and mark it - for each compound. Never, never use more than one compound on a given buffing wheel!

5.3. Though cross-contamination is less of a problem with the sheet or film abrasives, it is extremely problematic with the buffing abrasives. It is a good practice to label or color code your buffs to help reduce the likelihood of cross-contamination. Here the abrasive particle is generally so small that the size difference is not visually apparent. When the buff becomes clogged it can be cleaned with a dressing stone, a wheel rake or a piece of hacksaw blade (18 TPI) wrapped in friction tape to protect your fingers. Hold it against the bottom third of a SLOW spinning wheel and keep it as perpendicular to the wheel as possible. There are also commercially made buffing wheel rakes and abrasive stones sold for this purpose.

6. METHODS
6.1. There are two methods of using abrasives. For deeper scratches in the briar, and for tooth-marks and extreme oxidation on the stem, one will start with an abrasive film or paper with a 1000 grit size or finer and repeatedly abrade the surface with finer and finer grits of abrasives until the subsequent scratches are so fine that they appear to be non-existent (making certain that the scratches left by the preceding abrasive have been completely removed!). Once a satisfactory surface has been obtained - or if the surface is already smooth - one will use a compound applied to a cloth wheel spun by a motor, and progress from coarser to finer abrasive compounds in small steps.

6.1.1. The most common mistake that I see, from both amateurs and those who should know better, is to ignore this principle: to repeatedly abrade the surface with finer and finer grits of abrasives, in small increments, (making certain that the scratches left by the preceding abrasive have been completely removed!) until the subsequent scratches are so fine that they appear to be non-existent. I have repeated this many times over because it is that important! In fact, one can usually improve almost any pipe costing under $100 by meticulously sanding it with 1000 to 8,000 paper, then buffing with Tripoli. Most pipes under $100 are sanded to 600 or so, then polished with Tripoli because the price point doesn't permit meticulous, step-by-step hand sanding with finer and finer grits!

6.1.2. I have seen bowls, stems, tampers, jewelry and other objects sanded with 600 grit paper and then taken to a Tripoli wheel then waxed without carefully and completely sanding or polishing the surface with each and every intermediate abrasive. While such a surface appears shiny (only if you squint), it is not as reflective as it could be because of the intermediate scratches left behind and not removed. An analogous situation is on an automobile that someone has waxed without removing the “micro-scratches” that the automatic car-wash leaves: it looks fine from a distance, but viewed in direct sunlight, those pesky scratches become visible. Both are indicators of poor workmanship. The practice of sanding thoroughly with each abrasive one step at a time is such an important concept in obtaining an "optical quality finish" (i.e. one that reflects as much light as possible and appears to be liquid) that I can not emphasize it enough. Folks ask me how I get my stems or my car to have such a lively, reflective shine – what’s my secret? I’ve just told it to you: the removal of scratches by meticulously using each and every intermediate abrasive!

6.2. Each grain of abrasive is in reality a sharp, small grain that acts as if it were a tiny plane, and scratches off a minute bit of surface material; obviously it leaves behind small “scratches” or grooves the size of each abrasive particle. By moving to the next screen-size and slowly and thoroughly sanding the surface,
those scratches are replaced with smaller ones and so on until the scratches are so small that they appear as a highly reflective surface to the naked eye. At about 1 micron (approx. 14,000 screen) the surface becomes quite reflective, but plastic eyeglass lenses are polished with .5 micron compounds and high quality optics with .03 micron!

7. PRACTICAL APPLICATION

7.1. The appearance of many pipes, tampers and even fountain pens range can be improved by a run-through with micro-abrasives because the makers rarely will spend much time on an inexpensive article, and some judicious hand polishing by the reader can produce a pleasing luster.

7.1.1. Since this is not the PIPE RESTORATION FAQ, I will not delve into the minutiae of that process, but for these tips. Before starting, clean the airway of the pipe with a small bristle brush made for this purpose - dipped into a small dish of Everclear grain alcohol, running it through until the alcohol runs clear. Follow this with pipe cleaners dipped in alcohol. If it is an estate pipe, I soak the stem in a quaternary disinfectant overnight. Ream excess carbon/cake from the bowl. Wipe the rim of the pipe with a Q-Tip dipped in alcohol until the tar and carbon have been removed. Be judicious: too much alcohol or pressure will dissolve the stain! If you remove the stain, or want to re-stain a pipe, buy a powdered aniline stain. I dissolve mine in water, because I feel that the result is more transparent and lively than if it were dissolved in alcohol.

7.1.2. Small dings and dents can often - but not always - be removed with steam. The wood in a dent has been compressed, and steam will often swell the underlying wood, causing it to “fill” the dent. Either a steam iron (ONLY if it has a "burst of steam" feature) or a clothes steamer are suitable: simply aim the jet of steam directly onto the dent for about 15 seconds. After two or three burst of steam, the wood will either swell back to, or close to its original form - or not. I do not recommend mastic fills for pipes. Enough woodworking/restoration; let’s get back to the subject at hand!

7.2. Begin by using 1000 grit abrasive paper on a foam block. Take long, gentle strokes that conform to the shape of the bowl or stem. Alternate each stroke with a following stroke ninety degrees to the movement of the first stroke. Slowly and methodically stroke the work until the entire surface of the pipe and stem have been sanded. Pay attention to the edges of the button, and the rim, and never, never alter a contour. Examine your work under a 15x loupe; pay attention to the button and sharp contours to ascertain that you have not
rounded any edges or changed any contours. The surface should have a uniform finish. Re-stroke any areas that do not.

7.2.1. Next, repeat this with successively finer grades of abrasive films until you reach 8,000. I can not stress the importance of taking small steps - it is this that gives the mirror finish. In fact the most common mistake I see is going from 600 or 1000 paper right to the buffer with Tripoli! Each grain of abrasive, whether on film, paper or a cloth wheel, and no matter what it is made of, is a sharp-edged particle, not unlike a chisel or plane blade. As a compound-laden buff turns, or a sheet of abrasive film is stroked each of those particles acts like a mini-gouge, taking the "edges" off of larger scratches while making them more shallow. The surface is to be repeatedly abraded with finer and finer grits of abrasives until the subsequent scratches are so fine that they appear non-existent. If you skip a step, you are merely rounding off the sharp edges of a larger scratch, thus reducing its optical reflectance - but not improving the surface. (This, BTW, is what cheapie auto detailers do - called a "squint-job" in the business: it looks good if you squint!).

7.3. TO THE BUFFER. At this point, the workpiece is taken to the buffer, but if you are like me, you will sand up to 12,000 before going to the buffer, and then go to FABULUSTER; Tripoli is used only if the stem is green or brown from oxidation or if you stop at 6000 or less abrasive film/paper. Now, holding the stem, mentally divide it into halves. Remembering that Tripoli and FABULUSTER are friable (that is, the abrasives break down into finer and finer pieces) you will want to start on - and stay on - one half of the workpiece until you reach a final luster, then re-charge the wheel to do the second half. Put a coarse cotton wheel on an arbor, turn the speed on low; and with medium pressure, touch the bar of Tripoli (or FABULUSTER) to the spinning wheel for a second or two at the most. It should visibly color the wheel, but not load up compound on the wheel; this is called “charging” the wheel.

7.3.1. Hold the workpiece firmly in BOTH hands, and gently touch it to the lower quarter of the wheel as it faces you, and immediately move it slowly and evenly from left to right, never stopping. Remember that it is the “loose-ends” of the wheel, that is to say, the last 1/8 to 3/16th of an inch of cloth that holds the compound, and that does the work. Consequently, there is no need to force the work into the wheel; The work should be pressed into the wheel for that 1/8 to 3/16, and no more; if you are visibly distorting the wheel, you are applying too much pressure; if you can hear the motor slow down, you are applying too much pressure. Let the spinning surface of the wheel, not the motor, do the work!
7.3.2. If excess compound is visibly transferred to the workpiece, you have used *way* too much compound; touch the spinning wheel lightly with your wheel rake to remove the excess. Keep the workpiece moving; do not stop while the work is against the wheel. Polish the first half until you have achieved a luster that you are happy with. Using the same principles, finish buffing the pipe.

7.3.3. Next, wipe the remnants of the Tripoli from the work with alcohol on a cotton ball that has been slightly dampened – *not wet, not soaked* – in alcohol, and repeat the polishing process with FABULUSTER until you have a bright, mirror finish!

8. WAX – THE FINISH

8.1. A pipe finish is unlike any other wood finish extant. All other wood objects are sealed and protected with a finish that is a barrier which lays on top of the wood, and is then waxed; a slightly different finish is an “oil” finish which technically soaks into the wood, but actually has a thin layer which dries – or polymerizes – on top of the wood. Pipes are finished differently: carnauba wax is applied to bare wood, with no intervening finish; it is melted by the friction of the spinning buff, and transferred to the pipe where it hardens. Every article that you will read about waxes and polishes on woodworkers’ sites deals with furniture and the like where the finish lies on top of the wood (and is then waxed); further, furniture is not subjected to the constant handling that a pipe is, nor the high heat that it is subjected to. Consequently the information on woodworkers’ web-sites is – at best only partially applicable to pipes.

8.2. CARNAUBA WAX is a hard solid wax exuded from the Brazilian Carnauba Palm; it is sold in flakes, and melted into pucks. It can only be applied if it is softened. For furniture and automobile uses, solvents are added to it to soften it so that it can be applied. In fact the most expensive paste waxes are only +/- 35% carnauba, and often, other waxes – natural and synthetic – are added, as are other polymers, making them really unsuitable for pipes. Once softened with solvents, carnauba will never revert to its rock-hard natural state, and that is the reason that paste waxes are not suitable for a pipe finish. The only way to seal raw briar is to apply carnauba wax with a buffer.

8.2.1. Let’s digress for a moment and talk about maintaining that shine between re-applying wax with the buffer. If you use a paste, liquid or spray wax or furniture polish – with or without carnauba – you are actually softening and removing the buffed-on carnauba with the solvents in the paste/liquid/spray; this is not a good thing! I suggest two approaches: the first is to use a soft, woven cotton cloth (such as a T-shirt) with nothing on it and buff with it; the second is a commercial product called BRIAR WIPE.
If you do use Briar Wipe, it is important to follow the instructions carefully and allow the solvents in it (it is a mixture of solvents, silicone polishes and synthetic wax) to evaporate COMPLETELY from the cloth – this takes at least 24 hours. If you do not, the residual solvents will soften and remove the carnauba that was buffed on. Once the solvents have evaporated, you are left with a mixture of silicone and synthetic wax on the cloth, and wiping the pipe and stem with the cloth transfers them to the waxed pipe, making it shiny and fingerprint resistant, while slowing oxidation on the vulcanite stem.

8.2.2. You will read many articles about synthetic waxes vs. silicones vs. carnauba wax both on automotive detailing and woodworkers’ sites. While reading them, keep firmly in mind that a pipe does not have a hard finish like furniture or a car, and is (obviously) not used in the same manner; thus the material presented does not apply to pipes! I have been making/finishing guitars for over 40 years, and am an automobile aficionado who spends hours detailing my car with a Porter-Cable orbital buffer in a four-step process. I’ve read the debates, and I have no problem with using synthetic or silicone polishes (along with carnauba) on my cars or guitars or furniture or pipes – I’ve been doing it for years. My advice is that rather than take the advice of a self-appointed expert, read the debates (I think the show-car detailing sites have the most in-depth articles) and try each product for yourself and come to your own conclusion. Just remember: if you use a paste, liquid or spray wax on a pipe you are actually removing the buffed on carnauba, and exposing the bare wood; if using BRIAR WIPE, always let the cloth dry completely!

8.3. APPLYING THE WAX. Mount a clean fine-weave wheel on your buffer, spin it at about 900 to 1000 SFPM, and touch the “puck” of carnauba to it for a second or two to transfer wax to the wheel, and lightly touch the pipe to the wheel. Keep the pipe moving, keep the pressure light, and don’t keep going over and over the same area: wax “on” is wax “off” by the next pass! Remember that you need only a THIN coat of wax; if you apply it too thickly, it will become sticky as you smoke the pipe.

8.4. Next, mount a flannel wheel on the buffer, spin it a bit slower, say 700 SFPM, and lightly buff the entire pipe until it gleams. There! You’re finished!

9. IN CONCLUSION

9.1. I hope that this little paper has been of some help in demystifying the art of finish sanding, buffing and polishing to those who would like to master this craft. As you grow comfortable with the buffer, you can speed it up so as to work faster, but always remember: SAFETY FIRST! Don’t take a chance – you
eyes and fingers are valuable and not worth the five minutes you save by rushing a job!

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This FAQ is a compendium of knowledge and advice for the pipe-smoking enthusiast interested in the aging, storage and cellaring of pipe tobacco. The primary source of the excerpts used in this document is the public archive of the USENET newsgroup alt.smokers.pipes. I have attempted to quote each writer's words precisely, and their meaning faithfully. I have taken the editorial liberty of making slight changes for purposes of readability and conciseness. Each author retains ownership over their original words.

Many of these questions have a subjective component, and therefore do not have a single correct answer. In cases where there is a difference of opinion, I have tried to present each view evenly. It is up to the reader to choose which approach suits their aging objectives.

Note: all the text that occurs in these little boxes is my own commentary.

Cheers, Jason Newquist
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Section I ~ General Questions

1.1 What is Aging?

There are a couple things that are often lumped together as "aging." The first is more properly termed melding or marrying. This is the result of the various tobaccos "swappin' spit," resulting in something is closer to a homogenous blend than a mixture of different tobaccos. Most consider this a desirable thing, including me. This will probably take place under just about any condition imaginable, providing the tobacco is kept properly humidified.

But, then there are the subtle biological and chemical changes that take place in that sealed tin. These are slow, slow processes. Many organic reactions just take TIME, unless hurried along through catalysis or heat. Heat is a poor bedfellow of tobacco, as it radically changes it - unless of course, those changes are desired. So, we're stuck with the waiting game. Waiting for microorganisms to do their work, waiting for slow organic reactions, which lead to other slow organic reactions, and so on. Once these processes are well under way, the introduction of fresh air can, and will, change things dramatically. GL Pease, 2003-04-17

Basically, there are a couple of things which go on. If tobaccos are allowed to play in the same playground for long enough, they start to take on each others characteristics. The blend becomes more integrated and more harmonious. Complexity remains (and is, in most cases, amplified), but the overall characteristic is more like a finely rehearsed orchestra, rather than a bunch of individual musicians; individual notes are still there, but are so well integrated that they become less noticeable than the whole. GL Pease, 1997-10-13

1.2 Why Does Tobacco Age?

The whole aging thing is pretty amazing, really. From what limited research I've been able to do on the subject, and based on a lot of speculation, it goes something like this: It's all about microbes. Some live in air (aerobes), some live only in the absence of oxygen (obligate anaerobes), some live in either environment (facultative anaerobes). Each does a different thing, and the order of what they do is important. Aerobes eat stuff, consume oxygen, spit out CO2, and eventually die, 'cause there's no more air. Facultative and obligate anaerobes can then live, some of which will consume the chemicals left behind by the now dead microbes as by-products of their metabolic pathways.
So... The tobacco is sealed in a tin. Aerobic bacteria (and facultative anaerobes, I suppose) go to work consuming some of the sugar, producing CO2, and using up the oxygen in respiration. Once the breathable air is gone, the aerobic bacteria die. Facultative and any endospore borne obligate anaerobes will then set about to do their things, probably relying on fermentative anabolic pathways. Most of what we're interested in is the production of esters - organic flavor and aroma components. This can be easily accomplished by some of these lovely living factories. 

GL Pease 2001-10-17

Tobacco requires moisture to age. Some oxygen is necessary for the initial stages of fermentation in the tin. There's plenty of sugar in most leaf, and the presence of yeast, or, more specifically, the enzyme they secrete, zymase, will result in primary fermentation of some of those sugars. 

GL Pease, 2001-05-03

Also, there's a secondary "fermentation" which takes place as the residual sugars in the leaf continue to be broken down. This adds some flavours which don't exist in the original mixture, and further increases the complexity of the smoke. GL Pease, 1997-10-13

1.3 Does Properly Sealed Tobacco Have A Shelf Life?

Tobacco doesn't need preservatives. The curing process is sufficient to ensure that tobacco, if stored properly, will last indefinitely. It *can* mold, if too wet, and ultimately rot, again if too wet. But it doesn't putrify, spoil, rot, become septic or anything else which warrants a "preservative." The reason some manufacturers put humectants [chemical preservatives] in their tobaccos is to prolong the "shelf-life" of the "fresh" (read moist) tobacco. For some reason, people don't want to find their own personal "humidity index" for their tobaccos, so the manufacturer second guesses, loads the stuff with propylene glycol, and packs the stuff in little pouches. Not all tobacco is so adulterated, but in some cases, the tobacco in pouches is, while that in tins is not. Pouches have a shorter "shelf-life." GL Pease, 1997-12-22

In terms of quantity sold: most tobacco mixtures are flavored with chemical additives. This includes almost all 'dime store' blends, most premium continental European blends (including most of the traditional English blends being produced on the continent now), and many premium US & UK blends. These blends will most probably not improve with age & are probably best smoked as close to 'off the store shelf' as possible. John C. Loring, 2000-05-04

One complication is that some blends will simply be over the hill in 40 years. Many latakia blends fade over time, and really only have a 30 year shelf life. So I have to hope that whatever blend it is will still be available in 20 years' time if I am to enjoy them in 50 years. Michael D. Lindner, 2001-11-16
Some tobaccos, most notably Virginias and Virginia blends, seem to have the longest life expectancy; I've smoked Three Nuns that was over 50 years old, and it was simply amazing. Latakia mixtures don't seem to improve for as long, but still a long time. I've smoked stuff that is over 30 years old, and it's wonderful, though some 40+ year old Balkan Sobranie I smoked last year had become a little disappointing. *GL Pease, 2001-02-02*

### 1.4 Does Aging Actually Change & Improve Tobacco?

It depends on the blend and on your individual palate. With some tobaccos, it's night and day - a grassy, bland taste when young blossoms into a sweet-tart, malty flavor with a little age. With others, it's not as overt - a shift in the "color" of the flavor... away from brightness and toward deeper notes, or perhaps just a mellowing of a previously aggressive flavor element.

Then, sometimes, there's just the "wow" experience... Where a tobacco blend is smoked at just the right moment in its lifetime. Where your senses all scream "This is the BEST thing I've ever put in a pipe - EVER!" It only happens once in a blue moon, which I suppose is a good thing. I don't think I could handle dealing with that sort of bliss on a constant basis. *Rob Novak, 2004-07-08*

You will definitely benefit from cellaring tobacco. Aging a tobacco blend allows the various tobaccos to "meld" together. The tobacco will also begin to ferment as it ages, this improves the blend as well. A significant difference is usually not noticed until the blend has aged for at least six months. *G.W. Fletcher, 2001-05-10*

As a rule, many quality, unopened tinned tobaccos can and do benefit from aging. I really enjoy smoking tobacco that has been aged a considerable time (10+ years). It is fun to check out "hole-in-the-wall" stores when I'm on the road and find a treasure trove of old tobaccos. I find that giving the leaf extra time to marry adds a wonderfully sublime quality. *Jeff Folloder, 1997-10-12*

Once you've smoked natural tobaccos for a while, you can then make more intelligent choices about what types of tobaccos to pursue. I personally found that high-quality natural tobaccos, expertly blended and aged, offer a taste that is infinitely more interesting, complex and satisfying than any artificially flavored tobacco. Your experience may vary. *Paul Szabady, 1999-10-26*

If you have never seen Cairo or Three Nuns change from light brown to a deep, rich, chocolatey brown then you're missing something. *Edward Mitchell, 2002-05-20*

Aged tobaccos may not be to everyone's tastes, but they're worth exploring. When you find a blend you really enjoy now, put a few away for later. *GL Pease, 2001-08-15*
The golden rule is if a tobacco is natural and you like it as it is when fresh, then you're likely to like it even more when it is aged. If it is a flavored one, then the risk of your not liking it later is greater (no one can predict the chemical interaction of the tobacco components and the artificial flavoring).  
*Tarek Manadily, 2000-09-24*

Great tobaccos age to become wonderful tobaccos. Bad tobaccos age to become bad old tobaccos. Though it might become "better" with time, if the stuff isn't pretty darned good when it's young, it never will be. *GL Pease, 1999-06-01*

Aging generally mellows the tobacco, creates subtleties of taste, and reduces bite (if any to begin with). Don't know if I would call this enrichment, but it definitely improves it. *James Beard, 2000-08-12*

Personally, as I smoke stronger tobacco, I don't worry about aging because the tobacco is defined less by the subtlety and complexity of flavor and more by the depth of body and strength, which really doesn't change all that much over time. Of course I do put tobacco into a "cellar", but not for the purposes of expecting it to get better. *magnulus, 2004-02-05*

### 1.5 What Kind of Taste Does Aged Tobacco Have?

Some of us have grown to love the "funk" that comes from well aged weeds in tins. Charles Rattray, on the other hand, didn't even believe tobacco should be kept in the tin for any length of time, instead feeling that fresh air was essential to a tobacco's proper life expectancy. He believed it should be purchased, and smoked as quickly as possible. *GL Pease, 2003-04-17*

You can't really go wrong with tinned blends, providing you like them when they are "young." At worst, the stuff will mellow a little, meld a little, and become better integrated, less focused. At best, time will yield increased complexity, depth and richness, with some of those amazing surprises that only age can provide. *GL Pease, 2001-01-16*

Perhaps the easiest way I can think of to get some idea of what happens to a blend as it ages would be for you to get some fresh McClelland's [bulk] 5100; try some now and jar the rest. 5100 is a good one to do this with as it's just a straight red Virginia: no perique or stoving to complicate the issue. Then in about three months get some more of the fresh stuff, smoke it and then open your three month old jar and try it. This is what I did and even though I have nothing resembling a sophisticated palate the difference almost knocked my socks off. After you try that terms like maturity and fullness will mean something to you. *Bob, 2001-11-06*

The only problem is that tobacco, like wine, being a natural product, inevitably changes slightly from crop to crop. Steps are taken to hold the flavours fairly consistent, but some slight changes are bound to take place. I recall when I was just learning about Balkan Sobranie in the early 80's.
The crop of 79 was different from the crop of 80, from the crop of 81, and so on. The changes were often very subtle, but detectable. All were good. Now, with almost 20 years on the tins I squirreled away, the effects of age has been similar upon all of them, and only now can the differences be really appreciated. I've got quite a few vintages of the stuff, and it really is different from year to year, though only slightly. *GL Pease, 1999-06-02*

**2.1 How Long Should I Let Properly Sealed Tobacco Age?**

How patient are you? I've got tobacco that's 30 years old, and even older, that is wonderful. *GL Pease, 1999-01-14*

Provided blends are cellared in decent conditions, they should 'improve' with age for at least one to two decades and in all likelihood for longer. When they 'peak' is probably as much dependent upon individual taste and storage conditions as the blend itself, but I suspect that in most all cases if reasonably well stored it is sometime after at least a decade. I also suspect that the greatest improvement comes during the first decade, that for the most part the peak is sometime during the third decade, but that the most memorable experiences will come, together with some disappointments, from well stored tins closer to a half century old. *John C. Loring, 2000-05-04*

I've smoked Three Nuns that was over 40 years old, and was magnificent. I've also smoked Balkan Sobranie of a similar vintage, and found it over the hill, though a 30 year old tin, sampled the same night, was spectacular. [...] Any truly exquisite tobacco will stand up to the test of time, and be bettered by patience. When it will begin to decline is highly speculative. Five years is safe, as, probably is ten. Beyond twenty years lies the gray zone. *GL Pease, 2000-05-03*

There is some practical upper limit to this, just like with wines. At some point, the tobacco's smoking quality will actually begin to decline. This turning point is determined by several factors, including the types of tobaccos in the blend, the conditions under which it is stored, how much air was left in the tin at packaging time, how moist the tobacco was originally, and so forth. As a general rule, the darker a tobacco, the longer it will age, while lighter, more delicate leaf loses some if its flavour and aroma if aged too long. (Interestingly, some light tobaccos will get quite dark after a few years of aging. Lemon Virginias, for instance, can turn to a lovely nut-brown.) *GL Pease, 1997-10-13*

**2.2 Do All Kinds Of Tobacco Leaf Age Equally?**

Virginias, and to a lesser extent, oriental tobaccos, age wonderfully. Latakia softens a bit, but still has a nice sweetness. Burley is still Burley. Since it has essentially no sugar in it, there's
nothing to ferment. Sure, the flavours meld and mellow, but the stuff really doesn't change character much.  *GL Pease, 1998-07-09 (revised 2003-12-23)*

Aging seems to plateau at different times for different types of blends. While Virginias seem to last nearly forever (I've smoked some Three Nuns tobacco from the late 1940s that was unbelievably wonderful), Orientals, particularly blends very heavy with Latakia, and little or no Virginia leaf, seem to have much shorter lives. But, in any event, 20-30 years seems quite safe. (I have some Garfinkel's Orient Express #11 that dates back to the mid 1960s, and the stuff is sublime, while some Balkan Sobranie I sampled from the 1950s was clearly "over the hill." Quite sad, really.)  *GL Pease, 2001-08-15*

Today there are relatively few blends available that will improve with age; these are Virginia, Oriental & Latakia blends to the extent they are not chemically flavored or laced with chemical preservatives, primarily the few remaining traditional English blends, e.g. Dunhill, and some small American blenders who use tins suitable for aging, e.g. Hermit Tobacco & Gregory Pease.  *John C. Loring, 2000-05-04*

From my experience with tasting old tobaccos, Virginias, really good ones, have indefinite life expectancies. I have no idea where the plateau is, or if there is one. Perique is another tobacco that seems to age indefinitely. Good grades of Turkish have sufficient sugars to hold their own for an amazingly long time. Latakia does not. Burleys are interesting. Being higher in nitrogen than other leaf, a Burley that is not well cured, properly sweated and well aged before blending will produce the greatest amount of ammonia if left in a sealed environment. But, assuming it's a good quality leaf to start with, it will continue to mellow somewhat for a finite period of time. Beyond that, I feel there's little to be gained by extended aging. However, a good Burley/Virginia blend will probably continue to age well, much like a good Virginia/perique blend will. This is merely speculative, however, as I have no empirical evidence to support it. That said, ANY blend worth its salt should age a minimum of 20 years, and probably much longer.  *GL Pease, 2001-01-14*

Nearly any good tobacco, like a good wine, will improve with age. How much it will improve, and how long, depends on a lot of factors. Virginias and perique will improve with age, seemingly indefinitely. I've smoked ANCIENT Virginias and VA/perique blends that were just sublime. Oriental tobaccos seem to age for a very long time before losing their delicate flavors. Latakia ages, as well, but over the course of time, it begins to lose some of its spice, and after many, many years, it can go quite "flat." Burleys soften a little, get a little more mellow, but don't really seem to age.  *GL Pease, 2001-04-04*

Virginias, and to a lesser extent orientals, undergo greater changes over time than Burley will, largely due to the greater sugar content of the leaf. Burley is essentially sugar-free, the diet tobacco. While it does undergo some of its own changes, the most important of these is probably
the loss of "edge" and harshness that many Burleys can possess when young. If the tobacco is good, much of this mellowing has occurred before the leaf is cut and blended.

Burley is a bit of a chameleon when it comes to its flavor. The leaf is very "open," and it takes on the flavors and aromas of the tobacco surrounding it. When first blended, the Burley component can readily be picked out in the mix of flavors. Within days, the change is already noticeable. It's still there, still identifiable as Burley, but it's already begun to integrate into the blend. Over months or years, this assimilation will become more complete, and the Burley's influence will become more and more subtle.

Personally, I don't think it's worth it. Spend your cellaring money on Virginia and oriental blends, tobaccos that will improve and develop over time, and smoke the Burleys while they're young. They may not get worse, but they're not likely to get much better, either.  

GL Pease, 2002-04-24

It appears that orientals change [in the course of 6, 12, and 18 months, and perhaps even more] more notably and more rapidly than other leaf. I've long suspected this, but have done no controlled experiments, so it's still little more than supposition.  

GL Pease, 2003-12-30

2.3 How Well Do Aromatics Age?

Aromatic tobaccos may or may not age, depending on the base tobaccos, and how they were flavored. Casing can kill the fauna that are responsible for the early phases of aging, so Captain Black, in all probability, will not age.  

GL Pease, 2001-04-04

Since mass-market styled aromatics use low character base tobaccos and spray their top note or sweeteners, these tobaccos will actually decline in character over time. Heavy cased aromatics, both in bulk form and in packed form (pouch or tin) should be used "fresh" and not left to cellar. True cavendish processed aromatics, usually Danish produced, can be smoked now, but will continue to improve over a period of time of up to a year. After the first year little additional change will occur in the base tobacco of Danish Cavendish, although the flavor, sweetness and character will "hold" for several additional years under proper storage conditions.  

R.C. Hamlin, 1995 Pipes Digest

The real problem, I believe, is that a majority of heavily sugared and sauced aromatics rely almost exclusively on the additives to provide flavour, using the lower grades of tobacco to simply carry the flavourings to the smoker, and provide some nicotine for body and "strength." These lower grades of leaf do not benefit from age. To cite the wine metaphor once more, no amount of aging will make a bottle of plonk anything more than old plonk, while a bottle of a grand cru will develop much of its complexity and bouquet only after years of bottle age.
It is not the fermentation, or cessation of fermentation through a hostile environment which produces the bad taste found in the tobacco equivalent of "old plonk." There is a difference between aged tobacco, and tobacco which has just gone stale, and that difference starts long before the aging process has worked its magic.  

2.4 Are There Milestones In The Aging Process?

The most major changes occur over the first six months to a year, though there is significant improvement in two months. After a year, it takes about another year to notice much difference, then about two more...see a pattern? After about 10 years, things really slow down. But, smoking tobaccos that have been aged 2-5 years is a real treat, and worth the wait, for some blends.  

GL Pease, 1998-03-08

There is really no optimal interval, but there are ranges that are significant. The first real difference is noticed after a couple months in the tin. Here, the melding of the flavors has really started to take place, and there's a little more "evenness" throughout the smoke. After about 6-months or so, significant fermentation has begun, and the flavors really start to become enhanced. Beyond that, 1-year, 2-years, 5-years show distinct changes, though not as dramatic as the early ones. Aging continues, but at a slower pace. There's not a lot of difference between a 5-years old tobacco and one which has been aged for 6-years, but at 10-years, it's noticeable, though subtle.  

GL Pease, 1999-06-01

As with wine, the best thing to do is to buy plenty, cellar it carefully, and taste it often - at six months, at a year, at two years, again at five. It is better to enjoy it sooner, and dream of what it may become, that to find it over the hill later, and lament what it might have been.  

GL Pease, 2000-05-03

It seems that somewhere between 12 and 24 months is something of a magic number, and that seems to be pretty universal amongst most tobaccos I've experimented with.  

GL Pease, 2002-05-20

While six months makes quite a difference, I've noticed that 18 months to two years is really where the turning point lies. You can expect increased complexity, a rounding out of the flavors, enhanced sweetness, and greater depth.  

GL Pease, 2004-08-05

2.5 Do Blending Houses or Tobacconists Age Tobacco Before Selling?
That tin of McClelland's No. 27 Virginia which has a 1999 date may have been harvested sometime between 1994 and 1996 (depending on just how that company does it). Sometimes the length of time is even longer, like the Kentucky that Greg uses in Cumberland -- for 20 years it sat in bales in some hidden controlled-environment tobacco warehouse, fermenting and aging and mellowing, before someone stumbled across it and said, "Who the hell didn't sell this?"

*Krister K., 2003-09-08*

It often takes a while for the blends to marry and to soften the edge of newly shredded tobacco. Storing tobacco means the blender will have to pay taxes on the inventory and he has his money tied up much longer. Same thing with cigars. The tobacco is aged only as long as required to provide a decent smoke. Wine is sold green or young for the same reason. It is drinkable, but is nowhere near it's potential. Selling young moves the aging to the buyer, removes the inventory (thus taxes), and returns the money to the seller. *Walter L. De Visser, 1998-03-30*

I look through the tins when I go tobacco shopping and try to find the oldest, dustiest ones - or in the case of McClelland's I look on the bottom and find the oldest date codes. Several shop proprietors have figured out that I'm nuts, but I don't mind - at least I'm smoking aged tobacco while going insane! *Colonel Panic, 2000-12-19*

### 2.6 What Are These Crystals On My Aged Tobacco?

The crystals that appear on aging tobaccos are more likely something that is soluble within a narrow pH range. These crystals are not very soluble in water. As the tobacco ages, the pH changes, and some things that had previously been in solution may, and apparently do, precipitate out. But, from some very preliminary testing, it is almost certainly not sugar. *GL Pease, 2003-10-01*

### 2.7 Does Heating or Stoving Tobacco Help? Can I Do It At Home?

Increasing the temperature would speed up chemical processes, making the aging go faster, but would likely not speed up all processes equally so the effects would be somewhat different. And increasing the moisture content would likewise speed things along, but may lead to speedy growth of mold. *James Beard, 2001-01-01*

Yes, heat will accelerate aging, but the aging and darkening will happen regardless - it just takes longer. Heat also changes the character of a tobacco. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. But, to be on the safe side, I have always advocated cool, dry, dark environments. (The darkness keeps the labels from fading.) *GL Pease, 2001-08-21*
Microwaves won't disrupt the micro-organisms present, but heating the tobacco is just not a good idea. It can undergo other changes, not all of which will be benevolent. [...] If you heat the tobacco sufficiently to kill any mesophiles that are present, you're cooking the tobacco, which will alter its characteristics dramatically. If you like a tobacco the way it is, raising the temperature to something in excess of 40C will certainly change it, and it won't be what you remember!

Heating tobacco can be beneficial, if its done by the blender. Stoving, steaming, panning all serve to change the tobacco in ways that CAN be beneficial, but it has to be done under controlled circumstances, and the blender must take the stoved leaf into consideration. *GL Pease, 2002-08-19*

The method is to bake the tobacco in the oven at 225 degrees in mason jars covered in tin foil for 2 1/2 to 3 hours. One main difference I noticed, was now the tobaccos have about twice the aroma than before. I also notice the flavor is more intense, and perhaps a bit rounder, more mature. I have no idea what the prevailing thinking is on this, but I do know that I'll be stoving some others to experiment as a result. *John Rocheleau, 2004-11-11*

At 300 deg. F, you'll do a little more than stov the stuff, and will, in fact, scorch it. The right temperature to do this sort of thing is no higher than 220 deg. F. Too, if you put sealed tins or closed up mason jars in the oven, be aware that they may explode. The pressure that builds up can be quite high.

After tobaccos are "stoved" in this manner, it'll take them a week or two to settle down. The changes over that timeframe can be nearly as dramatic as what you experience from the process itself! *GL Pease, 2004-11-11*

Having been told several times that heating my tobacco in the tins would improve the tobacco (Most likely many here have heard the old "Leave it on your dashboard on a hot day" adage), I was curious to find out if there was any truth I could detect to it. I put a stack of selected tobaccos out in a window for the entire month of August, through the EU heatwave with a full day's direct sun every day. I stored an equal tin of each blend away in my usual closet stash.

Recently I finally decided to open a pair of tins of Elizabethan, a mix that was recommended as a good guinea pig. I'm sorry to say I can't tell any difference at all between the two - they're both very good and as potent as ever, but the heated tin doesn't offer any depth or richness that the closeted one lacks. Not that I'm complaining, having two tins of good tobacco to smoke! :) It's possible that there wasn't enough heat involved (though, I have to say, solid weeks of 100 degree weather in direct sun seems pretty toasty). It's also possible that others of the test blends may offer different results. And, of course, it's likely that my taster may not be sensitive enough. For the moment, though, this looks like a bust at first glance. *Trever Talbert, 2004-04-19*
I took bulk 5100 and stoved it in a mason jar with aluminum foil on the top (instead of a lid) for 3 hours at 300 degrees. I stopped it before it became 5105. It is so superior to regular 5100 that it is the only way I smoke it now. max, 2005-01-29

I have stoved tobaccos many times, using different methods, such as leaving a tin in the trunk of a car (in the hot weather) for several days, in the rafters of my garage for several days, in the oven at 200 for different lengths of time. Overall, I've had the best results using a crock pot. It's best to check out the temperature, so if you have a meat thermometer put it in the crock pot and change the setting as needed to reach a constant temperature of about 150. Once you know where to set it to obtain that temperature, it seems to work best, put a tin or two or three or whatever different tobaccys in the crock pot and forget about it for at least eight hours - ten to twelve is even better. It works wonders with virginia and virginia/perique tobaccos. I've tried it with English blends but the results are questionable, at least for me. Johnny Flake, 2004-06-17

Over the past month or so, I have been experimenting with a different tobacco treatment. I say it's new only because I do not know of anyone who has done it in quite this way. This method may not be new at all but here it is, and I believe I am on to something. BUT TRY THIS AT YOUR OWN RISK!!!

The technique is limited in application, but results so far have been exciting, for me, but I am still experimenting. It's quite simple. I call the process, "220 for 220." I have used this mostly on Virginia (and some English) tobaccos up to this point but intend to try it with more Virginia and English blends soon. Here's what I have been doing. As I said, it's quite simple, really.

I take the ENTIRE TIN, UNOPENED and STILL SEALED, of a Virginia or English tobacco, REMOVE THE PLASTIC TOP and place it in the oven for 2 hrs and 20 mins, at a temperature of 220 degrees. I do not remove the label as this temp is too cold to set the paper on fire. Some tins swell and expand at the lid, but they seem to reduce to normal size, or nearly so, after cooling. So far, McClelland, Rattray's, McCranie's, and Pease tins have not popped open (with the exception of 1 tin of St. James Woods). The tall tins tend to hold their seal throughout the process. THE FLAT TINS, such as Escudo and Solani DO POP THEIR SEAL BUT THE RESULT IS STILL POSITIVE, for me, at least, as the tobacco inside does not dry out or become "roasted." After cooling for a few hours, I remove the tobac from the baked tin and place it in a separate container.

THE RESULTS? This process seems to change the tobacco in such a way as to, like stoving, make the tobac more dark in color, and makes it smoke more mellow, smooth, and often more sweet. Several experienced pipe smoking friends who have smoked tins thus treated agree with this assessment.

Try it with a tangy, sharp 2003 or 2004 Christmas Cheer and see what happens. This method made a tin full of the current version of McCranie's Red Ribbon smoke downright heavenly. And with the McClelland's, the vinegary ketchup smell reduces significantly, just as it does with
aging. And it made a tin of Rattray's Marlin Flake smell like oatmeal raisin cookies (must be some topping they put on it, that I was previously unaware of), but the topping seemed to meld nicely with the tobacco. I have not done this with aromatics and probably will not.  
Fred Hanna, 2005-01-28

Okay, I'm finished (220 for 220). The 220 for 220 Red Flake is a deeper red than the fresh tin. Much of the sharpness is gone and it's somewhat smoother. The flavor is different, not necessarily better or worse, just different. Only time will tell if I'll try this again, but I'm sure I'll enjoy this tin.  
Steven Fowler, 2005-01-29

For me, this is not meant to be a substitute for aging, but merely another way to enjoy young tobacco without having to pay top dollar for the old stuff. I love Virginias but I don't care for that tangy sharp taste. I love English blends but I don't care for the rough taste that many of them have before aging. This method seems to diminish the tang and roughness and that makes me a happy guy. I would only do this to a tobacco that I believe would benefit by it. It's that simple.  
Fred Hanna, 2005-01-29

I thought of [how this method will never replace long-term aging], but it shouldn't matter if you immediately open the tin. I think the idea is to make unaged tobacco taste better for immediate enjoyment.  
Steven Fowler, 2005-01-29

I am smoking a bowl full of the 220 treated Half and Half now. The tobacco seems to be more mellow and flavourful than the same tobacco before 220 treatment. I will use this method again in the future. I really think that it helped smooth and mellow this Va/Burley/Perique mixture.  
Lannes Johnson, 2005-01-30

Well, I've completed my experiment. I had some tins of Haddo's on hand, and as I posted last night, I baked one of them at 220 for 2:20. I opened two tins today and smoked samples from the baked tin and from an unbaked. Both tins have the same date stamp of 12/15/04. The first thing that I noticed when I opened the baked tin was the different tin aroma. It has a deep almost chocolaty tobacco smell. Not very much left of the fig & raisin aroma that I'm used to. Comparing it to the unbaked tin, it is much more mellow and sweet. The colors are not that much different. In the baked, there is a noticeable darkening compared to the unbaked, but not as much as I was expecting.

I smoked the baked Haddo's this morning, and it was wonderful. It was mellow, sweet, and noticeably different! And best of all, no "brightness" in the flavor! I puffed hard to see if it would bite, but it didn't. It got hot and didn't taste that great, but no bite! I set it down and let it cool and re-lit. It was a very nice mellow smoke to almost the bottom. The flavor was much "deeper" if that makes any sense.
I am now half way through the bowl of unbaked Haddo's in the same pipe as this morning, and boy, what a difference! For one thing, there's that Virginia "brightness". Just a bit of tangy harshness that you have to be careful puffing to avoid. And the harshness is just a fast puff or two away. The flavor while good is not near as good as in the baked. I would say that your process resulted in a very definite improvement in newly tinned Haddo's.  

Rad Davis, 2005-01-31

[Responding to reports that certain tins go "pop!" in the oven...] Keep the temperature of the oven between 170 and 180 deg F. Shouldn't have any popping then.  

Craig Tarler, 2005-01-30

### 3.1 Generally, Which Storage Containers Should Be Used For Aging?

I recently completed an experiment wherein the same tobacco was cellared, after blending, in heavy bags, glass jars and sealed tins. There is a slight, but perceptible difference between the tobacco aged (a mere 6-months) in the jars and in the tins, but a distinct difference between the bagged tobacco and the other two samples. This supports a theory which I have posited in the past that gas exchange is not advantageous to long term aging. The tinned/jarred tobacco had become much richer, with a lovely complexity not found in the bagged sample, even though the bagged sample had not lost significant moisture.

These results demonstrate that plastic bags are not optimal for long term storage or aging of tobacco, but that canning jars are nearly as good as tins, as long as they are left sealed, and in an environment which is not hostile to the contents.

In any event, use quality jars with good rubber seals. These seals do have a limited life expectancy, but that life is several, if not many years. I recently bought a couple of antique jars, and while I have no idea how old the rubber seals were, they were quite brittle and useless as seals. I've kept some tobacco in modern jars for upwards of 7 years, with no sign of deterioration of the seals, so good quality rubber will last at least that long, if kept in a cool location. High heat, extremely dry conditions and UV from sunlight are definite no-nos.  

GL Pease, 1999-05-04

### 3.2 I Have Tinned Tobacco. Should I Pop The Tins And Seal The Tobacco In Another Container?

Open tins dry out quite quickly, actually, which is not necessarily a bad thing if you are smoking it (some of us prefer out tobacco in the dry range of the spectrum), but a terrible thing if you are
aging it. Part of the process seems to rely on a sealed environment, in my experience. \textit{GL Pease, 1998-07-09}

Tinned tobaccos have a distinct advantage over "bulk" tobaccos when it comes to aging, providing you don't open the tin. The *lack* of oxygen exchange is actually beneficial to some of the organic processes which are responsible for the "aging," and, as long as the tins are stored in cool, dry location, you don't ever have to worry about the condition of the contents. \textit{GL Pease, 1999-01-14}

Once a tin is open, store it in a cool place, sealed as best you can seal it. [Aging is] an amazingly complex medley of carefully choreographed chemical and microbial dances. But, the bottom line is, when you open the tin, it's over. Other changes will take place, but it's never going to be the same again. \textit{GL Pease, 2001-10-17}

\textbf{3.3 I Have Bulk Tobacco. What Kind Of Container Should I Use And What Should I Avoid?}

When it comes to bulk blends the consensus seems to be to put the tobacco in an air-tight container. The main concerns here are to keep the tobacco from drying out and to avoid mold. Understand, that most "air-tight" containers are not completely air-tight, some air exchange will happen. Again this is where a proper environment (as mentioned above) will aide the process. I have also read that you should not give in to the temptation to open these containers during the aging process, doing so will prevent the magic that is "aging" and invite mold into the equation. If you wish to sample them at different stages, I suggest separate samples be put back for each stage that you wish to try them. \textit{G. W. Fletcher, 2001-05-10}

I've done some short-term experiments with various forms of packaging, and will say that tobacco that's been put away in heavy plastic bags for 1-2 years shows only a slight change, while the same tobacco, from the same batch, aged in tins had undergone significant change for the better. I'm quite convinced that sealed, non-permeable containers, whether tins or glass jars, are essential for proper aging. \textit{GL Pease, 2001-01-18}

If you buy fairly fresh tobacco, no matter what the packaging, break it up, and repack into sealed jars, you're good as gold. \textit{GL Pease, 2003-10-28}

For bulk tobacco storage mason or Ball [brand] jars with good rubber seals work very well as they are air tight and keep the contents from drying out. I would suggest keeping the jar in a dark place (closet, drawer, etc.). \textit{Bob Pelletier, 1997-11-23}

I use Mason jars exclusively. I use the large ones (Quart) for ageing, and I usually put 8 oz in these. You could fit more with tight packing, but I like them at 8oz. \textit{Joe LaVigne, 2004-10-11}
Jars are a better choice, as glass is less permeable than any plastic. The best thing is to fill the jars nearly full, as minimizing the air will improve the aging. So, press that tobacco into the jars, and put those lids on tight! If you warm the jars before putting on the lids, it will form a slight vacuum, which is also beneficial, both to keeping the lids tight and aging the tobacco.  

GL Pease, 1997-10-14

Glass is also kinda neat in that you can see how the color has changed over the years. The tobacco in the jar I'm referring to was golden brown when new, but now is almost black.  

Greg Sprinkle, 1997-11-23

[The GL Pease 8oz] bags are designed for aging, and for storage, they will be fine for years, though for long term, I still recommend the tins, for a couple of reasons. First, the tins *may* age more quickly, in the same way that wine in fifths ages faster than wine in magnums. While I've done some testing of the bags, that testing represents no more than two years of aging.

Once you open the bag, the process pretty much stops. The bag can be resealed, and will hold the contents in good condition for a long time, but transfer to jars is probably the safest thing.

As an aside, I put some tobacco in one of these bags, folded it over several times, and taped it up, just to see what would happen. Even without a true seal, the contents aged, and were in perfect condition when I opened it 18 months later. It's a darn good bag.  

GL Pease, 2003-02-11

3.4 What Is The Heat-Vacuum Technique?

You are going for a seal, not sterilization. You can use a shallow hot water bath to heat up the tobacco-stuffed jars or even a short time [15-30 seconds] in the microwave. The slight heating shouldn't seriously affect the tobacco, and all you need to do is create warm air in the jar so when you put the lid on, the warm air cools, contracts and seals the lid.  

Robbie, 2001-06-08

The jar should be immaculate and dry when you put the tobacco in it. The tobacco should be of proper moisture content for smoking, or perhaps slightly on the dry end of the proper range. The seal on the lid should be in good shape. If you wish to "vacuum seal," prepare the jar by putting it in a pan of near-boiling water for maybe 15 minutes and then [fill with tobacco,] put on the top, and tighten well.  

James Beard, 2002-01-29

My method that has worked very well, providing an air tight seal yet allowing for aging, is to store in mason jars, and then process in a hot water bath to seal the jars. I just put the jars in a pan of boiling water until the temp inside the jars is high enough to expand the air inside, then I tighten the rings on the jars and allow the jars to seal. There is a slight negative pressure inside the sealed jars, but there is still enough air in there to allow for aerobic aging. My Cajun Half and
Half stored in this way keeps getting better and better with every passing month. The hot water bath also provides some light stoving to the tobacco. *Stephen E. Williamson, 2004-01-19*

When putting the tobacco into jars, heat/vacuum sealing is not only not necessary, it's probably not optimal, as air is an essential component in the aging process. Just make sure the jars and lids are CLEAN, and seal-em up. To clean the jars, I recommend a couple drops of bleach along with hot, soapy water. Rinse them thoroughly, and let them air dry, inverted, to minimize the risk of mold spores finding their way in. It may take a while for the bleach smell to completely leave the jars, so give them a sniff before you bottle up the baccy. *GL Pease, 2003-02-11*

### 3.5 How Well Do Bail-Top Jars Work For Long-Term Storage?

I have a half dozen of these, that have held various blends for more than 6 years, without ill effect. *Terry Hagley, 2000-05-12*

The bail top jars are better suited to being opened frequently since the gaskets on the canning jars are very thin. For long term storage I (so far) prefer the canning jars. I've had at least one bail top gasket split in many places (over time), and no longer trust them where I can't see them. *Fred Latchaw, 1999-08-21*

I use the wide mouth jars that have large rubber gaskets and wire cages. Based upon my experience with some Gawith and Hoggarth Dark Birdseye Shag, tobacco is good for more than a decade in the aforementioned containers. *Irwin Friedman, 1997-11-32*

I once did an experiment in which I took the same tobacco, tinned 2oz, put 2oz in a bail top jar, put a bunch in a double-thick, heavy plastic bag. The tinned and jarred tobaccos aged nicely after just six months, while the stuff in the plastic bag showed only the improvement one can expect from melding, even though the moisture content was unchanged. *GL Pease, 2001-07-04*

One thing to keep in mind is that the rubber gaskets used with [wire cage] jars will deteriorate. If left alone, they'll probably last 20 years. If opened after about five years, the re-seal may not be reliable. The current rubber gasket material used for Mason jars seems to be a very durable rubber compound. I have some that are about 20 years of age and they're still functional. *Buddy, 1998-11-05*

A comment on the bail top jars. I have been using them to cellar tobacco for the past few years. The tobacco I have stored seems to be picking up the smell of the rubber gasket. *Jim Kooy, 2000-05-08*

There are a couple of different sorts of gaskets available, and I have noticed that some seem to possess more "rubber smell" than others. A couple of the jars I have have a silicone gasket which
has little detectable aroma to it, though I don't know where these would be available individually.  
*GL Pease, 2000-05-08*

### 3.6 How Well Do Vacuum-Sealed Plastic Bags Work? Why Are Vacuum-Sealed Tins Different?

Fully evacuated plastic pouches: Up until about two years, these work fine at sealing the tobacco. However, minimal aging takes place, probably due to the lack of oxygen. The pressure compacts the mass into a fairly firm block, nothing like a real pressed flake, but pretty solid as the pressure continues over a period of years. I found the apparent effects of this "pressing" the best aspects of the method of storage. Unfortunately, somewhere between two and three years, enough H2O vapor escapes to begin a drying process, usually noticeable around the edges of the tobacco mass, which begin to feel crispy through the plastic. Note that the vacuum remains tight—the plastic used apparently passes H2O more easily than O2, N2, or other atmospheric gasses. Bottom line: not recommended if you want to age the tobacco. I recommend double bagging and double sealing.  
*Toren Smith, 2001-07-25*

No problems, just less real aging. Some air is necessary to start the whole process off. It's been shown that sucking out the air will "preserve" the tobacco in its current state, and that little or no change will take place over time. So, while it may be fine for storage, it's not going to provide the advantages of age. Toren's experiments, interestingly, also demonstrated that vacuum sealed tobacco can dry out, while still maintaining the seal! Apparently, the plastic used in the vacuum sealers is somewhat permeable to H2O, but less so to atmospheric gasses. Different materials provide a good barrier to different types of molecules, while being permeable to others. Not knowing what material the bags are made from, I can't comment on why this happened, but Toren's experimental methods are quite sound.  
*GL Pease, 2001-08-16 (revised 2003-12-23)*

Vacuum sealing is a bad idea. (I read an ancient Rattray's catalogue on tobacco, in which was presented a short discourse by Charles himself. Old Chuck had some pretty strong words to say against vacuum packing, and experiments conducted by myself and others, notably Toren Smith's recently published findings, bear this out.)  
*GL Pease, 2001-08-15*

There is a difference between an air tight tin and a vacuum sealed bag with all the air evacuated out. A sealed tin still has a small amount of air left in it. This allows the tobacco to age; the chemical reactions that take place in aging require some air to get going. A plastic bag with all the air removed will not have enough air left for the reactions to start.  
*Mark Hogan, 2003-05-21*

The vacuum used to seal tins is minimal. Foodsaver type vacuum pumps are quite weak, but they do a very good job of evacuating a great deal of the air from the bags they use [which therefore prevents substantial aging from occurring].  
*GL Pease, 2003-07-06*
3.7 How Quickly Should I Smoke An Aged Tin, Once Opened?

A few months of aging can produce some wonderful volatile components that begin to disappear to the atmosphere as soon as the tin is opened. Of course, putting the contents in a jar helps, but once opened, tobacco should be smoked, just as wine should be drunk. In addition to the loss of volatiles, the increased oxidation doesn't seem to do the tobacco any good.

Of course, the older the tobacco, the greater the post-partem depression. When you cut the top off an old knife-lid tin of something, and the fresh air hits it, the changes start. I have always considered the first bowl out of an aged tin to be the most sublime. When opening these things, I want to be right over the top of the tin, to catch the wonderful aroma that escapes when the top is removed.

I don't always follow my own advice, and on more than one occasion, I've put an open tin of something "away" to enjoy later. The experience has never been as good after a few weeks as it was that first day. I realize some like to let their tobaccos breathe, but in a properly produced blend, this is not only unnecessary, it lets too much of the goodness out before you can get to it. (If, for example, there's ammonia in the tin when you pull the top, the tobacco should never have been put in the tin in the first place.) GL Pease, 2004-11-05

I have observed, however, that once the tin is opened, the tobaccos within these ancient tins seems to fall apart rather quickly, losing their essence and power as the days go by. They need to be smoked quickly, as just as aged Bordeaux and Burgundy fall apart quickly after opening the bottle. I once was fortunate enough to attend a wine tasting that included an 1875 Chateau Mouton Rothschild. The flavor was there at first but was pretty much "gone" after 15 minutes. Old Virginias parallel old wines, but fortunately they last a lot longer after being exposed to air.
Fred Hanna, 2004-11-05

4.1 How Do I Properly Prepare Jars For Tobacco Storage?

1) Sterilize the jar (boiling works, but I just put it in the dishwasher at the highest possible heat).
2) Dry the tobacco to [your desired] smoking moisture, or just a tiny bit moister. 3) Put #2 in #1.
Inquisitor, 2000-10-26

Heat the jars in hot water (close to boiling but careful, boiling could crack the glass if you don't allow them to temper in the water properly), pour in the tobacco and then seal the jars. The heated jar will create a vacuum as it cools. Jeff Schwartz, 2000-10-27
Put the stuff in the jars, after a through washing (the dishwasher works well, but run an extra rinse cycle, to rid the thing of any aromas from the detergent, and don't put the rubber gasket in there), and, assuming the moisture level of the tobacco is right to start with, it will stay right. Then, put the jars in a cool, dark place, and forget about them until you are ready to sample the delightful contents.  

GL Pease, 1999-08-19

The jars should be sanitized before use--running them through the dishwasher is best, but if you don't have one, the usual techniques used for beer-making are fine. Also sanitize all surfaces and containers you'll be working with, and wash your hands well and often. Mold sucks.  

Toren Smith, 2001-07-25

### 4.2 How Do I Pack Tobacco Into Containers For Long-Term Storage?

The tobacco should be moist. Not dripping, of course, but pop the lid on a tin of GLP tobacco and check it out. That's the way you want it. Water is as necessary as oxygen to the aging process, and you can always dry it out to your preferred level when you [open] the jar. [...] Don't pack it in too tight. Remember, oxygen is your friend in the aging process. I never pack it any tighter than I'd pack a pipe for smoking.  

Toren Smith, 2001-07-25

I'm far from an expert, but in the short time I've been "canning" tobacco, I typically find I can fit about 1/2 as much tobacco as the jar size given (i.e. 4oz of tobacco in an 8oz widemouth jar).  

Kip, 2004-04-26

The [2:1 ratio is] pretty close, though I've found the fit depends on the cut of the tobacco, and the humidity level. There are some tobaccos which, if I attempted to fit in that 2:1 ratio, would be way too tight. The good thing about wide-mouth canning jars is they are dirt cheap, and allow me to store bulk - purchased tobaccos affordably, yet they are nice and tight, and stay sealed forever, even if they are opened on a regular basis.  

Steve Lawrence, 2003-04-26

### 4.3 Can I Dip My Canning Style Bulk Jars In A Sealant, Like Wax Or Parafin?

If you don't seal with wax you run the risk of air migration into (or out of) your [canning-style] jars. I use paraffin, which my local grocery stocks. It's cheap, fast and easy, and if I'm careful, it requires no cleanup.

Over the years, air pressure changes along with temperature changes can cause a vac-sealed jar to lose its seal. Gasses may be released by the aging tobacco that negate the vacuum; which combined with the above mentioned outside forces, may cause leaks. And if you're only relying
of hand-tightened threaded seals, even with rubber gaskets, you're just asking for trouble. Why go to all the trouble to jar up tobacco for aging if you aren't willing to take the final step to be safe? *Tim Parker, 2003-05-29*

After I fill the Mason jar with tobacco, I tighten the lid, turn the jar upside-down and dip the top (to just below the lid) in paraffin. I have had a couple of jars over the years where the top didn't seal perfectly. Of course, the tobacco will dry out. Also, it doesn't provide the anaerobic environment that facilitates the aging process. The tobacco inside is not affected by the paraffin on the outside. The paraffin is just insurance, and in most cases is not necessary.

I melt paraffin in a double boiler and allow it to cool. Just before it turns solid I dip the lid under the paraffin. You can tell it's ready to become solid when the wax starts to turn opaque. When it's really hot the wax is transparent. **BE CAREFUL: PARAFFIN IS FLAMMABLE.**

Heating the tobacco and jar in the microwave is not necessary. Simply, boil the jar for 10 minutes. Take the jar out of the boiling water with tongs and turn upside-down. The big drops of water will empty by gravity and the rest will evaporate in a few seconds. While the jar is still hot, stuff the tobacco in and seal. It cools within a couple of minutes. The cooling promotes a vacuum. Cool air takes up less volume than the previously warm air. Even after a few days, the lid of the jar is indented on top, due to the vacuum.

I know it sounds like a pain in the ass, but it's not that bad. Actually, I kind of enjoy it. It's become a ritual. *Steven Fowler, 2003-05-29*

Unevacuated sealed mason jars (bands/lid dipped in paraffin after sealing). This gave by FAR the best result, with excellent and sometimes surprising amounts of aging. A recently opened sample of McClelland 5115 smelled utterly delectable and smoked like a dream [after 3 years] -- it was *vastly* superior to identical samples packed on the same day using methods 1 [fully evacuated plastic pouch], 2 [unevacuated plastic pouch], and 3 [evacuated mason jar]. *Toren Smith, 2001-07-25*

**4.4 Does The Aging Process Of A Sealed Container Stop Once It Is Opened? Does Aging Restart Once I Seal It Back Up?**

Once air is reintroduced, the anaerobes snuff it. If there are endospore forming, they'll sporulate, and the process *could* conceivably be restarted, *if* the correct environmental conditions were made present. But, one of those correct conditions is the absence of oxygen. So, either the tin would have to be fully evacuated, or some aerobic bacterial process would, once again, have to consume the O2 that is now in the tin. It's all a delicate dance of tiny life forms. Once you mess
up the ecology that's been carefully crafted over thousands, even millions of generations of bacteria, it's tough to get it back "the way it was."  

GL Pease 2001-10-17

If you buy tobacco with significant age already, the picture changes. As soon as you open that tin, or high-barrier bag, you introduce significant changes to the environment within the container. From that point, all bets are off. Perhaps I shouldn't say that the blend will no longer age, but it will age differently from that point forward.  

GL Pease, 2003-10-28

The aging process is a series of both biological activities and organic reactions, some of which can be very slow. Many of reactions tend to happen sequentially, so once the environment is radically changed by introducing fresh air, all bets are off. Further, all those lovely aromas that emanate from that freshly opened tin are volatile organic products that, once shared with the angels, is lost and gone forever. There's no way to reverse time and return things to the original state. Once you open it, smoke it. It will certainly change, but it will not likely improve in the same way that it will once it's sealed up.  

GL Pease, 2003-11-11

4.5 Is There Any Advantage To Storing Bulk Tobacco In One Large Container, Or Many Small Containers?

One of the reasons, probably the most important one, that I recommend smaller packaging for long-term aging, is that, in my opinion, the delicate flavours that result from the aging process begin to dissipate as soon as the package is open. Volatilization, oxidation, other chemical processes take place, and the stuff changes. My belief is that once an aged tobacco is opened, it should be smoked fairly quickly, to enjoy it at its best. So, buying the 8oz bags, breaking them up into smaller quantities, and sealing them in jars is a reasonable alternative to the tins.  

GL Pease, 2003-10-28

Keep an eye on things once you put it up. Better to do lots of small jars than a few large ones, so you can taste them over time. Keep notes. You'll learn a lot about the aging process this way. It's great fun.  

GL Pease, 1998-03-08

4.6 Once I Open A Tin, What Are Some Good Short-Term Storage Options? How Long Is Short-Term?

I have found spice jars to be excellent containers for small amounts of tobacco. I'd recommend small mason jars for storage, but once you open the mason jar, put it into a spice jar. Many of the spice jars that you can buy from kitchen stores have a little plastic shaker lid with a mylar-type
liner inside. I keep these in place. Very convenient, inexpensive, easy to organize and store, and they seem to hold around 5 bowls' worth. *inquisitor, 2004-10-12*

Once [a container of tobacco is] opened, there are many options for storage, but, ideally, it should be consumed within a month or two of opening. *GL Pease, 2003-05-06*

I always transfer open tins to half pint mason jars, then label the top. These make for excellent storage, and they are easy to stack. *Joe LaVigne, 2003-11-01*

An opened tin is good for a few days (maybe, in the Mojave Desert) to a few weeks, and maybe several months if relative humidity is high in your area. But don't count on much more than a few weeks. *James Beard, 2001-02-04*

Round tins with screw-down lids can stay fresh for many months if the lid has a rubber/plastic gasket and you make sure to tighten it properly. Mac Baren and JF Germain tins have the right kind of gasket, and I have kept those tobaccos fresh for up to a year when I screw the lid down tightly. Tins with plastic pop off lids, such as McClelland's, Rattray's and GL Pease, will not stay fresh very long, maybe a month or two at best. Either smoke these quickly or transfer the contents to bail-top jars. Rectangular tins are the worst since their lids can't be tightened. A few weeks after being opened, you'll find these tobaccos completely dried out. I store rectangular tins in ziploc freezer bags, even for very short term storage. *Tim Parker, 2003-11-01*

There are volatile components that dissipate to the air if not contained, and, once gone, they're never coming back. When I open a tin of something I'm not going to smoke fairly quickly, I usually either put the contents in a canning jar for longer term storage, as has been suggested, or at least, in heavy zip-locks if shorter storage is likely. *GL Pease, 2002-07-01*

I have solved the problem [of too-dry tobacco] by using small plastic bags. If I leave the tobacco uncovered in the tin, it will dry up, especially the tobaccos that are moistened only with water. So when I open up a new tin I always put the tobacco in a plastic minigrip bag, press the air out and the I put it in the tin. *Jari, 2002-06-29*

A simple way of keeping tinned tobacco moist for a short period of time is to place a small plastic sandwich bag over the open tin and then screwing the lid tightly down over the bag. *Max Kama, 2004-01-06 (via email)*

### 4.7 What Can I Do To Prevent Mold Contamination?

Mold spores are literally everywhere. Whether or not they begin to bloom is a bit of a mystery. I've lost a jar of Balkan Sobranie, some Penzance, a jar of Perfection and a tin of F&P Templar to mold. Just use very clean (boiled) jars and pray for the best. The only 100% sure way to get
spore/mold free tobacco would be to use a heavy dose of gamma radiation, but it sounds a bit overkill. ;-) Tapio Pentikainen, 2000-10-22

Actually, there are enough mold spores around that any tobacco not in an air-tight sealed container will have some in it. But mold requires free water to thrive. The spores can survive for eons in a dry environment, but they cannot grow. Just let there be free water (not chemically glommed onto something else) and the stuff flourishes. [...] I would suggest drying the tobacco until it is at the low end of the acceptable moisture range for you, and then store it far, far from your other tobaccos (just in case). It may be you will be able to smoke all remaining before the mold gets enough water to wreak havoc. James Beard, 2000-07-26

Vinegar won't disinfect [jars]. It'll kill alkalophiles, in sufficient concentration, but that's just not enough. Try bleach. (Another reason not to use plastic containers - they'll hang on to the bleach "aroma," and be nearly forever tainted.) Just add a little bleach to your hot, soapy water, and wash with that. Rinse thoroughly, and allow the container to air dry. (The last thing you want is to transfer whatever is on that dishtowel to the jar once you've gone to all the trouble to make it disease-free.) The bleach smell will dissipate, and the jars will be quite mold-free. You could also heat-sterilize the jars, using a pressure cooker, but that seems like SO much effort. GL Pease, 2002-01-11

Containers can definitely contain mold spores. Once mold is in a container it must be sterilized very aggressively. With glass containers its easier to accomplish. I would just toss a plastic container if it were me. Not worth taking a chance. They are more permeable, or absorb aromas and spores. Terry McGinty, 2000-06-22

Propylene glycol will prevent mold growth. It's possible a small amount in distilled water will serve the purpose without affecting the smoking quality. I routinely use a very small amount when rewetting moistening disks, and I haven't noticed any bad effects in English-type blends. Buddy, 1998-09-11

Everybody keeps blaming the climate at the point of storage for causing mold. Not so. While climate conditions can accelerate or discourage mold growth, the real question is how heavy a live mold spore burden the tobacco carries. Sterile tobacco will never grow mold, no matter what the storage conditions are. Most people do not store or handle their tobacco in such a place/manner that would introduce a lot of new mold spores, so my guess is that the spores are almost always already present when the tobacco is purchased. It also makes sense that people are reporting particular blends as being more susceptible to spoilage; between differences in final moisture content and handling conditions during production and packaging, you would expect that particular blends (and especially particular batches) would experiences more problems than others. You would probably find a good correlation with the geographic region and/or the particular wholesaler if you cared to do enough research. I smell a PhD thesis here! L.M. Spitz, 2000-10-19
Too much moisture seems to be the culprit; that and being in an enclosed environment. I had mold in years past, but not recently. I am inclined to let my tobacs dry a bit if there is any feeling they are too moist. [...] Since I prefer my tobacco a little on the dry side, I have a habit of letting the tin set with the lid off for awhile before I put it in the humidor. Perhaps this helps. I think it is because mold was more a problem for me years ago, before I watched the moisture level. Terry McGinty, 2000-10-23

Distilled water makes no difference. In fact, most municipal water is chlorinated to some extent, which MIGHT help to minimize mold. Did you get the tobacco too wet? Probably, but mold can even form on pretty dry substrates. GL Pease, 2002-02-26

4.8 I Have A Large Pack Of Tobacco I Would Like To Sub-Divide Into Smaller Containers. Should I Do This Sooner Or Later?

Your best bet would be to re-package it now, as once you open an "aged" tobacco, the little biosphere in the package will be forever changed, and things just won't be the same afterwards. It won't be BAD, but it will certainly be different.

[Very occasional smokers] might even consider repackaging into smaller than 2-oz quantities. Personally, I find that aged tobaccos deteriorate rather rapidly once opened. Again, they don't get BAD, but they lose a lot of the beautiful aroma they've developed over the years. Personally, I have always found the first bowl out of an old tin to be the most delightful. (Others feel that even a well aged tin must breathe a little before it's smoked. To each his own.)

That said, the bags are actually quite good for storage, and for keeping the tobacco in good shape after you've opened them. Refold the top several times, compressing the leaf somewhat, and put a rubber band around the whole thing to hold it tight, or use a binder clip on the folded part of the bag. I've got a bag of Robusto from the first run that I dip into every once in a while. It's not the same now as a freshly opened tin from the same vintage, but it's still very nice. GL Pease, 2005-01-07

5.1 What Should I Use As My Actual Tobacco Cellar?

As for storing unopened tins, I just pile them in a large plastic cooler, no humidification, in my basement. JHowell982, 2001-02-26
I love my cellar - it's a large ice chest with a handle and wheels, like a wagon. I've moved twice since starting to collect and age tins, and it's been both rugged and temperature-stable. I only age tins and sealed bulks, so I don't need much more than that. *Mike Jacobs, 2001-08-22*

My cellar consists entirely of cardboard U-Haul boxes, as well as the cartons the mason jars come in. I have boxes dedicated to tins of Pease blends, Rattray blends, Butera/Esoterica, and the rest. *Fred Latchaw, 2001-08-22*

I keep mine in boxes in a closet. *GL Pease, 2001-04-03*

I use coolers of various sizes and dimensions -- perfect accommodations for tins and bags of bulk. The coolers are kept in a closet. *Jeff Schwartz, 2001-04-03*

When we built our house, we had one of the rooms converted into a den. The closest was converted into my "cellar" by placing a bookcase in it. Most of my jars are on this bookcase (around 40 or so bail tops) with the rest of the shelves stacked with tins. *Stanmed, 2002-02-05*

I store my tobacco in a two door metal cabinet (typical storage cabinet like those used for office supplies). It is a cheap one from Office Max (US$100 or so). It has a lock to keep the kiddies out. *Charles Perry, 2004-08-02*

### 5.2 I Would Like To Stock Up A Cellar. Any Good Rules Of Thumb?

How big is your cellar? *Jeff Schwartz, 2000-10-28*

As much as you can get my hands on, or at least as much as you can afford. [...] When I empty a tin, I don't open anything from the cellar, I order more; typically in a one-to-five relationship, where I buy one to open and five to stash. *Fred Latchaw 2001-04-03*

Every time you buy a tin to smoke, buy one to "lay down" for a while. Better yet, buy two to cellar for a while, so you can build your sampling stash. *GL Pease, 2001-08-15*

Might I make a tiny suggestion? Start to think of yourself as a "tobacco collector", and those feelings of mild trepidation you're having will be transformed into immense pride. *Mark Shelor, 2003-05-12*

It took me a couple of years before I knew for sure which blends I wanted to cellar, and which blends cellar well. Until recently, I still had dozens of open tins - tins that eventually dried out as I began to smoke others regularly. I probably blew a few hundred dollars in tobacco over three years experimenting, but that's part of a hobby. I'm happy I found some personal favorites, and now I'm "investing" with a plan. I would have had no idea what to buy before I identified my ideal blends. *Mike Jacobs, 2001-11-19*
My objectives are: 1) never smoke anything that's less than five years old, and 2) to hedge against discontinuation of my favorites. Hedging against inflation is a nice side benefit but there's also a lot of economic risk associated with it - I don't mind the risk, but for me the opportunity cost just about balances any likelihood of tin appreciation. *Mike Jacobs, 2001-11-17*

### 5.3 What Kind Of Environment Should I Strive To Create For My Tobacco Cellar?

The main concern is to keep them in an environment that will keep the tins from rusting. The idea is an environment that does not fluctuate in temperature or humidity. *G. W. Fletcher, 2001-05-10*

The stuff should be stored in a cool, dry place. Dry is important. Tins, while coated on the inside to prevent rust from within, are susceptible to rusting from the outside in. There's nothing worse than opening a tin of something you've been looking forward to for years, only to find a dry, rusty mess inside. Rust does have a flavour of its own. It's terrible. *GL Pease, 2001-08-15*

Cool, but not cold, storage conditions will allow your tobacco to mature in a slow, even manner. The proper range is slightly less than room temperature (55 F to 65 F) for slow, steady maturation of tobacco. Tinned tobacco that is stored at a slightly warmer range, say 75 F, will mature quicker with only a slight loss in the overall final product. Remember that heat is used with steam, some types of pressing and stoving of tobacco, but these processes are used during manufacturing rather than the long term maturation of the "finished product". *R.C. Hamlin, 1995 Pipes Digest*

DO NOT put sealed tins in the humidor! Tins are actually made of steel, and pull-tops are aluminum, and corrosion is their worst enemy. I've lost some remarkable old tobaccos to the dreaded rust. *GL Pease, 1998-11-16*

### 5.4 Can I Cellar Tobacco In A Freezer Or Refrigerator?

No need to freeze tobacco. [...] Freezing *might* damage the cell structure of the leaf, if the temperature is low enough. The things you want to avoid are hot and cold cycles (can damage the integrity of the tin's seal) and excessive humidity, which can rust some tins. *GL Pease, 1994-12-27*
Do NOT store tobacco in your fridge or freezer [in a non-airtight container]. One of the purposes your fridge serves is to remove moisture from the air inside of it. You will end up with dry tobacco.  
*Michael D. Lindner, 1999-02-12*

Storing in a refrigerator is not a good idea unless you have absolutely air-tight bags to contain the tobacco. Tobacco will readily absorb aromas and flavors from anything in the area, and in a refrigerator there is a lot of stuff in the area that you might not want to taste in the tobacco.  
*James Beard, 1996-09-08*

[In a freezer,] the moisture in the tobacco will become ice. When water becomes ice, it expands. When it does this, it destroys the cellular structure of the tobacco. This must have an influence on the character of the smoke.  
*Sailorman Jack, 2004-01-04*

5.5 What's A Good Way To Determine The Age Of The Tobacco In My Cellar?

For me, writing the date on the top of a jar, or a tin, is really just a way to keep track of stuff. I actually keep a log book of what I cellar, when I cellared it, where it came from, and eventually, when I dip into it, and how much (relatively) I have left in the tin/jar when I seal it up again.  
*FatMax, 2002-05-20*

Buy twice as much as you smoke, and put the extra away in a closet. Label each tin with the date you purchased it, and realize that its age is indeterminate when you buy it. After a year, try some of your fresh stuff, which you have been continually smoking, and know and love, and some of the aged stock. Try again after two years. If you are a Virginia or Latakia mixture smoker, you'll be glad you did!  
*GL Pease, 1997-10-13*

Make sure that you date the tins in your cellar with the month and year of purchase. This can be done by writing on the label or using a marker on the underside of the tin. [...] I would suggest that you month/year date all tobaccos you decide to cellar. [...] As a final step in tracking the progression of tobaccos that you cellar, you should keep a log. Your cellar log can be as simple as a 3x5 card with dates and tasting comments or as complex as you like. Your log should list the dates that you added to your cellar, by type and brand of tobacco. You will also find if very helpful to keep tasting notes based on either a point scale (taste, bite, sharpness, softness, sweetness, etc) or just a text based reaction to each tobacco as they mature. This written history will serve you well when you track the other tobaccos in your cellar. A cellar log will help you learn to recognize the progression of various types of tobaccos, especially those that you decide to add to your cellar selection in the future.  
*R.C. Hamlin, 1995 Pipes Digest*
5.6 How Useful Is Keeping Track Of My Cellar's Inventory?

I started to do an inventory, once. Counting things, sorting things, putting things in columns is not something I'm particularly fond of, so after filling a couple pages of a legal pad with the miscellany, I gave up, and settled for getting a "feel" for what's stored in the cellar. *GL Pease, 2001-05-07*

I have put together a Microsoft Access database with pictures of my pipes and information about them. I also have a section of the database for tracking the tobaccos I purchase as far as date, type, impressions, etc. I haven't maintained it faithfully, but can see the potential in it for someone so inclined. *Fred Langer, 1998-06-28*

5.7 How Should I Label The Bulk Jars In My Cellar?

I write with an indelible marker on the metal lid. *Chris Keene, 2004-01-25*

Economy Solution: Dymo Labelmaker - less than $10 for the little one. Fancy Shmancy Solution: Brother P-Touch Label Maker. Overkill Solution: Custom label stock for your computer printer. Affix label to jar and then stick in place with wide, clear shipping tape. I use the economy solution for baccy jars. The labelmaker material sticks to the glass like glue. *Tim Daneliuk, 2003-01-25*

You need two things: 1) Sharpie marker, extra fine point. 2) Clear package tape. Write directly on the container's surface, cover with a patch of tape. Indelible markers only work on absorptive surfaces (cloth paper, etc.) - the ink will abrade / flake off glass or polished metal. The purpose of the tape is to provide a protective cover. Semi-caveat: Block print your letters, there is a tendancy for the ink to absorb into the tape adhesive over time, blurring the edges of your pen strokes. If you tend to print with a "small hand" you'll need to size it up a little. 3/16 or 1/4 inch capitals (proportionate sized lower case) done with a extra fine point are legible decades later. *Dave Keever, 2004-01-26*

I print "labels" from my computer, then use packing tape to attach them to the jars. Works every time for me. *John Offerdahl, 2004-01-26*

Instead of labeling the jars, I purchase small lightweight, cardboard tags (about $2-$3 for a 100), the kind with a looped string attached. I write the blend and date on the tag then loop the tag through itself on the lid, similar to attaching a luggage tag on a suitcase. This method works for Ball jars and should work for bail jars by attaching the tag to the wire on the lid. The string on these tags is long enough to hold the tag on the bottom of the 4 oz. jars when dipping it into paraffin if this is your method. The tag can be held on the side with your fingers for larger
preserving jars. When cooled, I place the jars back in the original box (with flaps removed), placing the tags, face up, on top of the jar. This eliminates the need to remove each jar from the box to see what the contents are. One quick glance will tell me what's in a box of a dozen jars. I stor my tabaky in an old, four drawer file cabinet.

If you are sealing the jars with paraffin, writing or affixing anything to the slippery wax becomes problematic. If you are not sealing the jars with paraffin, then writing on the lids or using an Avery label of the appropriate size would work just fine. *Mark Z.*, *2004-01-26*

Whenever I buy a pouch of tobak, I transfer it immediately to a clean mason jar and cut out the logo from the pouch which I tape it to the front of the jar for identification. Not the classiest thing I've ever seen but it does the job admirably and very cheaply. *KMFDM, 1997-01-13*

### 5.8 Besides Aging, Are There Other Reasons To Cellar Tobacco?

There is, to me, another compelling reason to have a tobacco cellar, and include in it blends that you enjoy but might not expect to do any more than taste at least as good to you as they do now: future availability and cost. Tobacco taxes seem to know only one direction-- up. There are a ton of new products on the market, and not all of them will survive. The return on investment from being in the pipe tobacco business has been deemed too low to justify staying in it in the past by some very prominent makers. Only a few years ago, things were disappearing right and left because of "bean counter" decisions. If the economy goes south, product liability insurance premiums go up, fashion trends change, whatever, then you will start to see those kinds of "bean counter" decisions being made again. *Daniel L. Merriman, 2000-10-06*

If I find something I don't like, I cellar it. As tastes changes, what I don't like now may be quite enjoyable to me later. And if I don't change enough, the tobak may. *Bill Triplett, 1999-08-18*

Maybe tobacco will be outlawed, maybe not. I'm not taking chances. Pick up a few years worth, whatever that means to you. If you smoke a pound of tobacco per year, hit your favorite shop and order 10-20 pounds of McClelland, Rattray, Esoterica, Dunhill, C&D, GLP, or whatever tobaccos you like. Seal them in some large mason jars. Worst case scenario is that you will have some primo tobacco to smoke in 10 to 20 years, or you will be able to pay for your kid's tuition [down the road]. *Inquisitor, 2004-01-14*

While a total [tobacco] ban in the US is possible, I think that the probability is very low. What does score a perfect 1.0 in probability is taxation beyond the reach of many of us. This is why I've curtailed buying pipes for the last two years and have been buying tobacco like it's going out of style - it is. After two years I've built up enough poundage to supply my smoking rate for about 10 years. *Dave Keever, 2004-01-14*
5.9 Can Rust Or Corrosion Be A Problem For Metal Containers When Cellaring Over The Long-Term?

I recently opened a jar of tobacco that I had canned last year. I had an impossible time getting the outer ring to unscrew, and eventually had to cut it off with wire snips. When I did, I discovered that the reason it wouldn't come off was because it and the inner lid had rusted together. I guess there had been some water left inside the ring from when I washed it beforehand.

The lid had not rusted all the way through, since it had been sealed only 12 months or so. Had I been more patient, however, and let it sit for several years, I suspect the rust might have eventually eaten through the lid. I always dip the top of my jars in paraffin, though, so I guess even then it wouldn't have done too much damage. A good point to remember in the "to wax or not to wax" debate, I suppose. **Joe00637, 2004-12-10**

My tins are internally coated, as are most tobacco tins. The rust problem is generally a result of the tins being stored in a humid environment; they rust from the outside in. I've had very few tins rust from the inside, though it's not unheard of, and even a good coating can fail occasionally. **GL Pease, 2004-08-27**

Some tins fare better than others. The worst tins seem to be thin aluminum ones, whose side walls can become perforated with little pinholes from corrosion far too easily. The next most likely thing to be effected is aluminum pull-tops. Examine these frequently for signs of damage, which will normally first appear as a white powdery area. If you see a problem area, wipe it off with a damp cloth, and keep a close eye on it. If you shake and tap on a tin, and it sounds dry inside (I don't know how to really describe this, but there is a difference in the way dry tobacco "sounds" when it's dry...) it would probably be best to transfer the contents into a glass container immediately. You'll lose some of the "bottle bouquet" of the sealed tin, but you'll save the tobacco. **GL Pease, 2000-06-23**

The rust won't hurt you, but it will impart an unpleasant taste and smell to the tobacco, if present in sufficient quantity. **GL Pease, 2002-11-23**

6.1 How Valuable Is A Quantity Of Aged Tobacco?

I think the following issues all contribute to the valuation of vintage tobaccos:
+ Production specifics. Is the blend produced any longer? If it is still produced, is it still available here in the USA? Are there differences in the production of what is available today and a vintage tin? Was/is the blend a limited run production?

+ Scarcity/Rarity. How often would you come across such a tin? If it were in your collection, how easy would it be to replace that tin? How often are these tins seen for sale? These questions take into consideration same size tin, same vintage, same condition.

+ Time. How long has the tin been aging? Can the tin be dated relatively accurately? Typically, as you might guess, older tins fetch more money.

+ Condition. Has the tin been well-kept? Is the seal intact? Are there excessive dents/abuse? Is there any visible surface rust? Does it sound solid and intact or dry and brittle when the tin is shaken?

+ Brand name. Is the blend a well-respected brand or blend? Of course, your personal tastes here are important, too. You wouldn't buy a tobacco you don't like, so it's kind of moot, anyway.

When you buy a tin for, say, $100, you are essentially paying for the original purchaser's patience and knowledge. The $100 buys you 20 years in aging that you might not have, or might not want to invest. It buys you their foresight in figuring which tobaccos would age properly, or maybe just their foresight to stock up on something when a recipe changed, or packaging changed, or whatever. You are also paying for one of the more enjoyable experiences associated with this hobby, the joy of smoking aged tobacco.  

I'm afraid age isn't everything. What is really going on is a combination of age, place, character & quality of blending with an emphasis on the latter elements. [...] When considering the price of old tins one should also remember that one is not only paying for both years and a blend that has no current equivalent, but also survival.

6.2 Where Can I Purchase Quantities Of Aged Or Vintage Tobacco?

You can buy aged tobacco at pipeshows, eBay and from private dealers you see advertising on alt.smokers.pipes.  

Aged quality tobacco is available from collectors, at a price. Old dusty tins from years back, sometimes many years, can sometimes be found in old pipe shops. Sometimes at the price indicated by the price sticker. Do check for corrosion or loss of the vacuum seal on sealed tins, as
this can lead to either drastically dried out or overly moist and moldy tobacco.  *James Beard*,  
*2000-08-12*

Buying older tins, on eBay and/or at shows, trading for them, whatever, can get very expensive very quickly. The three digit prices you see on eBay reflect a real market, they are not aberrations. The regular buyers do indeed know what they are doing. I am an agnostic on whether or not that game is worth the candle. It depends on the individual. Kind of like Cuban cigars -- if you are a serious cigar smoker, and can tell the difference, have the discretionary income to not only buy the bloody things but throw out a few every now and then that have quality problems, AND IT IS IMPORTANT ENOUGH TO YOU, then I would have to say that you are perfectly justified in making the expenditure.  *Daniel L. Merriman*,  
*2000-10-06*

6.3  **My Aged Tobacco Is Moist. Should I Let It Dry Out Before Smoking It?**

Once that tin is opened, a lot more than water is free to leave the building. And, leave it will. You can rehydrate the weed to get it back to smokable consistency, but those ephemeral nuances are lost and gone forever. [...] Some people like to air an aged tin for a while before they smoke it, much as we let a bottle of wine breathe a bit before drinking. I like to experience both the freshly opened tin, and the softer flavours as it gets some air. But, the reality of the situation is that once that vintage tin is opened, you have a limited time to smoke it before it starts to decline, a week, a couple weeks, a month, depending on a lot of factors. [...] This is possible the biggest reason I'm so dedicated to my scrappy little 2-oz tins. You can finish one, even smoking moderately, before it's had a chance to head south.  *GL Pease*,  
*2003-02-22*

Opened tins, for me, go through a curve. First, the tobacco is a little too moist, then it gets progressively better over the course of a week or two until it's fairly dry. It can stay at that point where burning characteristics and flavor are both good for another week or two, then it tails off and seems to lose flavor. So, I try to finish a tin within a month, more or less, from opening. I keep a limited number of tins open, and usually do not open a new one until I've finished an old one. Of course, sometimes I just have to try something right away, but usually I can wait a week or whatever until a vacancy occurs.  *JHowell982*,  
*2001-02-26*

6.4  **I Have Dry Tobacco. Can I Rehydrate It, Or Is My Tobacco A Lost Cause?**

If the tobacco is "bone dry" then I think rehydrating it will not bring it back to its former glory. If it is a little too dry, then rehydrating works.  *Sean Chercover*,  
*2003-02-21*
I, for one, think that, that they would smoke "ok", but really not be the total [tobacco] that they were. Sure, I've rehydrated tobacco hundreds of times. I've enjoyed the tobacco that was brought back, but it always seemed like "something" wasn't there... ya know? With foods, be it anything from orange marmalade to freshly brewed coffee, if you can smell it while in it's container, some of the scent/flavor is being lost to the air. *Bear Graves, 2003-02-21*

Adding moisture to a dried out tobacco would restore it to its former glory if, and only if, water was the only thing lost, which is not the case. This dissipation of nuance occurs much more quickly than we would like to admit. Consider the difference between freshly ground black pepper and what probably resides in your pepper shaker. *Loiskelly1, 2003-02-21*

I think once the tobacco has dried out, it's finished. I've found that once this happens, especially with aromatics, most of the flavors are gone. That's the reason I try not to have too many tins open at any one time. I used to stuff my tobacco pouch with enough tobacco for several pipes, but not any more. The tobacco dries out too fast. *Tom Greene, 2003-02-22*

Depends. The tobacco itself will recover nicely. There may be a few volatile chemical products of aging/fermenting lost, but this is generally minor. Bear in mind that tobacco is kept at very low (3 to 7 percent by weight) moisture content for 2 to 5 years while aging, before blended into something smokable, and blenders raise and lower the moisture content at will to facilitate processing. Hence, intrinsically volatile stuff is long gone before a label ever goes on a retail product.

Additives in the tobacco are another matter. Depends on the additive. Some will withstand repeated drying/rehydrating, and others are an absolute disaster. By and large, the higher quality the tobacco, the less damage.

And yes, for most, it won't be quite the same. May be better. And mixing in distilled water and allowing it to diffuse through the tobacco is all that is really needed. There are special rituals that some swear too, though, so you can make it as complicated as you wish. *James Beard, 2004-04-28*

### 6.5 What Are My Rehydration Options?

If you have to add water, do it slowly, mixing thoroughly, and letting it sit for several hours afterward to allow absorption. Some leaf takes quite a while to take up added moisture. The rule of thumb is this: If the tobacco is at proper moisture level for smoking, it's close enough to the proper level for storage. If it's sticky, it's too wet. If it is crumbly and dusty, it's too dry. *GL Pease, 1999-08-19*
Faster, but less desirable (the way I do it) - spritz with a little distilled water, put in mason jar and leave it awhile so the moisture has time to evenly distribute. *Cheryl, 2003-12-16*

Spread the tobacco carefully on a try, and with a spray bottle, filled with distilled water (I use an air tight one that produce very fine sprays), spray a layer of water all over the surface, making sure it all gets wet. Cover it for 10-50 minutes to allow the tobacco to absorb the water. Once you get to that point and feel the tobacco is elastic enough to handle, gently mix it and then place it back into a container. Let it sit for 24 hours, and it should be ready.

Now, this requires experience. The amount of water could be tricky. If, however, on the next day you open it and find it's a bit dry still, then a wet sponge with the tobacco should do the rest and take to the right level of humidity. If it's too wet, then follow the usual procedure of spreading the tobacco on a tray in the open air and check regularly till it becomes right. With practice, I now manage to do the job with no need to readjust the humidity, most of the time.

Remember, the tobacco gets dried and rehumidified and dried and rehumidified several times and to varying degrees before it's finally tinned and/or sold. Yes, you could argue it's never possible to resurrect a tobacco with 100% success, but, hey, I'm happy with 95%!

Please do not [put slices of apple or potato in the tobacco container]. It can (and will most probably) ruin your tobacco beyond recognition. *Tarek Manadily, 2000-06-12*

Using an apple slice is perfectly rational. It does not flavor the tobacco that much, but does serve to moisten tobacco quickly. Just cut off a little of the apple, put it in your pouch, let it sit there until the tobacco is moist enough and start smoking. Do it in your pouch, not in large cans, humidors, or whatever. [...] There are, of course, detractors in this arena. I only speak from my own personal experience of about 42 years of smoking and occasionally having to moisten my tobacco with apple slices. Others use potatoes because they do not want the apple flavor, but as I said, the apple flavor, if even there, is so slight that it will not matter. *R Perry, 1998-12-04*

Please be careful about the apple slice method. This is more likely to encourage mold growth than restoring your tobacco! The combination of humidity and sugar sounds like a laboratory culture growth medium to me! *Jim Gottliebson, 2000-06-13*

An age-old method for keeping pipe tobacco moist has been the ruin of many a pouchful of weed and should be publicly dispelled once and for all: it is the practice of placing a slice of apple or pear or other moisture-bearing fruit in with your favorite blend. Not only will this interfere with the natural taste of your pipe tobacco, but the slice of fruit will immediately start its natural rotting process, which, if left in the pouch or humidor long enough, will quickly cover your tobacco with a nice white fluffy mold, thereby ruining your ration of Nicotiana Tabacum beyond resurrection. The slightest trace of mold will also render your pouch or humidor completely useless unless it can be totally sterilized. *Richard Hacker, The Ultimate Pipe Book*
Hop on down to your local pipe store and pick up some of those little metal-encased clay disks. Soak 'em and throw one in each container for a few days. This usually works for me and there's no risk of apple (or potato??!) mold in your tobacco. *Boomgate, 1999-06-09*

Get yourself a few hydration disk, soak those in distilled water and drop them along with the tobacco into a tightly sealing glass container. Depending on the dryness you can drop 1,2, or more of them into the container. *Jeff Schwartz, 2001-02-18*

Put the [dehydrated] plug in the jar, loosely cover the plug with a small piece of waxed paper, and put the damp sponge on top of that. Having the moisture source in contact with tobacco is flirting with the Mold Demons, and the waxed paper keeps them separate. *Rob Novak, 2004-04-28*

### 6.6 Should I Keep Open Tobacco At A High Humidity, Like Cigars?

Unlike cigars, the humidity for storing pipe tobacco for use isn't as critical, I find. One of the reasons for this is that pipe tobacco is fairly easily rehydrated. In general, you should be OK just putting your tobacco in a jar with a good seal and storing it in a relatively cool place out of the sun. This way the tobacco will probably stay at the moisture it was at when you opened the package. [...] I find that I like my tobacco on the dry side. [...] One caveat: too dry is much better than too damp. You can always rehydrate if necessary, but there's nothing you can do if your tobacco goes moldy. *Kevyn Winkless, 2002-04-28*

With cigars, structural integrity requires a certain level of moisture. But this is not so for pipe tobacco. [...] If the humidity is comfortable for you, it should be fine for the tobacco. At the wet extreme, you wish to avoid humidity so high it encourages mold, and at the dry extreme you do not want tobacco so dry it crackles and shatters when rolled into a ball between the fingers. Between those extremes, it is basically a matter of personal preference. *James Beard, 2002-04-29*

### 6.7 Should I Dedicate Various Pipes To Different Blends, Or Blend Types?

"Dedicating" a pipe, means smoking certain types of tobacco in it. Like Virginia/Perique blends, Virginia blends, English blends, Burley blends, or Cavendish/Aromatic blends. Dunhill EMP is an English blend, and so it would taste strange if you were smoking it in a pipe that you have previously smoked, say, an aromatic in. *Ian Rastall, 2002-08-15*
I have very few pipes which are dedicated to a single tobacco - one is dedicated to Dark Twist, another to Hal o' the Wynd, and two danish horns to Larsen's Old Belt. I do, however have many pipes dedicated only to virginias and several that only see and are divided among either reds, oranges, goldens, or va/perique flakes.  *Greg Sprinkle, 2000-01-30*

Buy the best pipes you can affort and dedicate them to one blend only.  *Pascal Essers, 2000-01-30*

I keep track [of which pipes have smoked which tobaccos] on my computer in Microsoft excel. I know, it sounds like OCD and some would say I'm mad, but it works for me. I can tell which pipes I have allocated for which tobaccos, which dates I've smoked them, and how many times they have been smoked since they were last cleaned. Since I have quite a few pipes and I like to have at least about 3 week between smoking each one it is hard for me to remember when the last time I smoked one. This way I can look at my list an pick a tobacco I want to smoke then go down the list and pick a pipe that hasn't been smoked recently.  *Terry McGinty, 2000-01-31*

I haven't been able to dedicate any pipes to any particular type of tobacco. I just grab a pipe and smoke it. For some reason I like the residual tastes from other tobacs blending with whatever I'm smoking at the moment. I might be robbing myself of some subtle nuances or something to that effect. However, i am in fact creating a totally original and unrepeatable smoking experience each time I light up.  *Scott Curtis, 2000-01-31*

To a certain degree I do try and dedicate certain tobaccos to certain pipes. Certainly Latakia gets its own pipe. I smoke Latakia about 1% of the time. And, when I smoke it, I thoroughly enjoy it. My problem is that any pipe that is dedicated for such purposes will see little service. [...] Another level of dedication is dedicating a pipe within one particular tobacco type such as Virginia flakes, or, Virginia Perique flakes. Nothing quite so drastic as Latakia. For example, right now I'm breaking in a new Safferling volcano. For the first bowl I chose Rattray's Brown Clunee. The smoke was so incredible that I will never put another tobacco through the pipe. That's not to say it wouldn't be wonderful with any number of other Virginia blends, but once you've found such a fantastic pairing, what's the sense of diverging?  *Mingkahuna, 2000-12-19*

I do dedicate pipes to certain types of tobacco, but I don't exactly stress out over it if I'm in the mood for a certain pipe and tobacco at the same time. I have several pipes that have never seen Latakia (I smoke primarily VAs) but that may very well change. I also like the taste that a bowl or two of smoky English can leave behind when next I fire up a mild VA; this is what keeps old blends interesting when I'm feeling a tad jaded...  *Colonel Panic, 2000-12-19*

I do a combination of things. There are a few pipes that are dedicated to a single blend. When the same tobacco has been smoked repeatedly in the same briar, all manner of nuances will reveal themselves, and this is a delightful treat. But, this is also a smoking experience that requires concentration and contemplation. These are the pipes and tobaccos I'll smoke when I just want to sit in a dimly lit room and get lost in the experience, seeking all there is to find in each puff.
Once a pipe has been dedicated in this manner, it will see nothing but "its" tobacco until that tobacco ceases to hold my interest, or can't be gotten any longer.

Less obsessively, I sometimes dedicate pipes to categories of tobacco (VA or Latakia) and to styles of tobacco within those two categories. I've probably have defined a few more "styles" than necessary: Latakia with light oriental content and significant VA, Latakia with heavy oriental content and less VA, VA, VA with oriental, VA with perique, VA with burley. Pipes can move about within a category, but for any pipe/tobacco combination, I'll smoke at least 5 or 6 bowls of a single type of tobacco in a particular pipe, to gain more understanding of the tobacco itself. Typically, when I encounter a new tobacco I'd like to really get to know, I'll dedicate an appropriate pipe to it for a couple ounces. [...] I have a couple pipes dedicated to the rare bowl of aromatic.

The majority of my pipes are used with somewhat more flexibility. For instance, I'll smoke VA in a Latakia pipe, and the crossover effects can be really, really nice. The VA sweetens a pipe that needs a little something extra, and the essences of Latakia that remain in the bowl offer an interesting diversion from the straight Virginia. I find this combination very appealing.

It all boils down to "messing around with it." Each of us will have a different answer to the question, and the answer is not nearly as important as the experience gained while experimenting to find our personal answer. The process of seeking the perfect pipe/tobacco combinations adds yet another dimension to the complex set of equations of choice. Pipe smoking is a lifelong pastime, with something new to discover at every turn.  

GL Pease, 2000-12-19

I personally think that the issue is more about dedicating certain cuts of tobaccos to certain bowl-sizes. You probably wouldn't want to smoke a chunky tobacco like cube-cut burley in a narrow bowl, and you wouldn't want to smoke shag (very thin, fine-cut) in a big fat bowl, because it tends to burn hot and fast. So I tend to dedicate cube burley and slightly rubbed-out Virginia flake to my wide bowl pipes, and fine cuts to my smaller bowls.  

David Wise, 2002-08-15

I do really prefer the taste of Virginias in small diameter bowls. I think more of the subtle nuances come through, and the overall quality of the smoke, for my style of smoking, for my particular tastes, is somehow more refined. Big bowls tend to overwhelm my palate.  

GL Pease, 2002-08-15

Dedicating pipes to certain tobaccos is nothing less than a serious pain in the neck! But. It's necessary and does pay off when/if: (1) You have a sensitive tongue and palate. (2) You *really* want to taste a particular tobacco and maybe evaluate it as accurately as you can. (3) You have enough pipes in your collection to allow such practice. (4) You smoke/evaluate more than one type of tobacco on a regular basis.

I have pipes dedicated to: (1) Heavy Latakia. (2) Light Latakia. (3) VA mixtures (with or without Orientals and/or B. Cavendish). (4) Pressed VA without Perique. (5) Pressed VA, with Perique.
Flavored British pressed tobaccos (Bosun/Coniston/St. Bruno, etc).

Now, I allow myself some freedom with certain pipes. So, I have sub-categories. For example, I would have a few pipes that I could use to smoke both #2 and #3, #4 and #5, and some for #2 and #5, etc.

You see?! It is a pain! Why? Mainly because I sometimes crave for a particular pipe, but I either do not have its tobacco type handy, or I do not feel like smoking that tobacco type. The other way around is also true, but to a lesser degree (when I want to smoke a particular type of tobacco, but do not feel like smoking one of those pipes I dedicate to it).

As I always state, there are (and should be) no norms or codes of practice. No one understands your level of smoking sophistication (or lack thereof) than you, no one, other than you, knows what you enjoy or how you enjoy it best. Luckily, and to enjoy pipe smoking, you do not need to be sophisticated or have a sophisticated palate. *Tarek Manadily, 2000-12-20*

One of the difficulties that I see is that many tobaccos taste different in different pipes. We have seen it many times in the Blind Pipe Tobacco Reviews where someone initially dislikes a tobacco on their first smoke, but upon switching pipes finds many new and wonderful flavors. So, I think you have to smoke a new tobacco in several different pipes initially to see with which pipe it is most compatible. Then, if you wish, smoke the tobacco in the pipe in which it works best. *Inquisitor, 2003-11-11*

For me, though, one of the great pleasures is finding the pipe/tobacco combination that really works. It almost always seems to happen by chance. I'll pick up a pipe, smoke something in it, and be amazed at the interaction between briar and leaf. This morning, it was Abingdon in a little Roush Rhodesian. I have a couple of pipes that I'll smoke nothing but Three Nuns in. *GL Pease, 2003-11-11*

Dedicating has it's place, but it has a draw back too. If you limit a pipe to one tobacco you miss the fun of trying it with different tobaccos. Sometimes I want to smoke a particular pipe, but I want a different tobacco, so I just go ahead and see what happens. I have found that I have some pipes that are best with English blends, but the rest of the pipes are fair game for anything. *Mike Rothenberg, 2002-01-09*

With aromatics, since the flavouring is such a crucial part of the overall experience, it's impossible to dedicate pipes to "aromatics," and get fully "dedicated-pipe" results. The highly sauced ones will really saturate the pipe, and it will take nearly forever for their ghosts to cease lurking in the wood, haunting every subsequent bowl. Do aromatics benefit from the dedicated pipe syndrome? That's hard to say. Very few aromatics in my experience are possessing of much...
in the way of subtle nuances, so it may not matter. Then again, I'm biased, preferring more natural blends.  

GL Pease, 2003-06-23

I do not do so, even though I have more than enough pipes should I wish to designate individual pieces for particular types of tobacco. For me, it is too much trouble. Now, it is true that when you smoke an aromatic in a pipe and subsequently smoke an English blend in the same pipe, you will get some crossover -- that is, you will taste a little of the aromatic while smoking your English blend. Many folks find this disturbing. I like it.  

Sailorman Jack, 2003-05-13

My briars are divided into two camps--Virginia, and Latakia. I have two Falcons for yard pipes/test-drives, and one nice briar dedicated to aromatics and scented flakes. If you're interested in smoking aromatics alongside non-aromatics, I would definitely consider dedicating a pipe to flavoured weed as they will effect the taste of your bowl and influence the flavour of natural tobaccos in a way that you may not find desireable. The extent of that dedication is, of course, up to you (and the number of pipes you own!). I don't have any single-blend pipes dedicated at present.  

Kurt Slauson, 2003-05-13

6.8 I Have Been Stricken With Moldy Tobacco! Is It Ruined?

Once mold has hit the tobacco, it's pretty much hopeless. Moldy tobacco smells awful, and the smell permeates the entire jar/bag/tin. I don't know if it would hurt you to smoke it, but the smell is so bad, I wouldn't even consider it! The other thing to consider is that even IF you were able to get rid of all the blooming part, the likelihood of spores remaining is high, and as soon as your back is turned, they'll bloom too.  

GL Pease, 2000-10-01

Mold is an unfortunate fact of life. If there's a spore, and the conditions are right, it'll germinate, and you'll get mold. Distilled water makes no difference. In fact, most municipal water is clorinated to some extent, which MIGHT help to minimize mold. [...] I've heard a lot of talk about using a little vinegar in the water to retard mold. This is completely ineffectual. I've seen some pretty dramatic mold formations on tobacco that was literally doused with vinegar. I've had some tobacco grow small deposits that didn't destroy the entire stash. Some molds, though, smell SO bad, the whole batch is rendered unsmokeable.  

GL Pease, 2002-02-26

Everybody keeps blaming the climate at the point of storage for causing mold. Not so. While climate conditions can accelerate or discourage mold growth, the real question is how heavy a live mold spore burden the tobacco carries. Sterile tobacco will never grow mold, no matter what the storage conditions are. Most people do not store or handle their tobacco in such a place/manner that would introduce a lot of new mold spores, so my guess is that the spores are almost always already present when the tobacco is purchased. It also makes sense that people are reporting particular blends as being more susceptible to spoilage; between differences in final
moisture content and handling conditions during production and packaging, you would expect that particular blends (and especially particular batches) would experiences more problems than others. You would probably find a good correlation with the geographic region and/or the particular wholesaler if you cared to do enough research. *L.M. Spitz, 2000-10-19*

Molds which grow on tobacco are generally benign, but can taste awful. Generally, these molds also smell pretty bad, and you'd never consider smoking tobacco so contaminated, any more than you'd eat foods which mold (some cheeses being notable exceptions). Well aged cigars often have a "bloom" on them which is not only harmless, but can be prized among those who like a really well aged cigar. Clearly, no mold is best, but tiny quantities can be removed from the tobacco and the remainder is generally okay. I've had some 30 year old Balkan Sobranie with a bit of bloom on the surface which was removed before smoking the rest. I don't know if this bloom was responsible for the wonderful flavours, but they sure didn't hurt. I am not, however, advocating smoking *moldy* anything! *GL Pease, 1998-09-29*

There are many forms of mold that can attack agricultural products. The dreaded blue mold attacks primarily living things and can be disastrous and ruinous to cultivation of grapes and tobacco. *Jeff Folloder, 1998-08-30*

Some molds, like some bacteria, love acidic environments, while others do not. If mold spores are present, and you give them the necessary environmental factors to support their germination, you're going to get mold. Anything that would eliminate the spores would also eliminate the beneficial flora responsible for some aspects of the aging process. There's no easy answer to this problem. *GL Pease, 2002-01-11*

**6.9 What Is Propylene Glycol? Is It Evil?**

PG is propylene glycol. It is a humectant used to preserve moisture content in variety of things, from food stuffs to tobacco. It is considered safe for human consumption by the FDA and its use is quite prevalent in modern society. In tobacco, specifically, it is added to maintain moisture and retard mold development. When used in very small quantities, it is hardly detectable. However, if used with a heavy hand it just plain tastes bad. It exists and is actually in most of the tobaccos we smoke. *Jeff Folloder, 2000-07-02*

Propylene glycol and other humectants are heavily used in drugstore tobaccos and jar blends to keep them from drying out. Some of these tobaccos will not dry out if left loose on a newspaper for a week. Premium blends, however, usually do not have as much PG as drugstore blends, but it's hard to find one that has [absolutely] none. [...] Propylene glycol can prevent tobacco from drying out and helps retard mold growth. It is, however, a chemical that many of us would rather not have in their tobacco. Discovering that a favorite blend has a small amount of PG in it is not
going to keep me from buying it. But knowing that a blend is treated with PG and other chemicals might very well keep me from even trying it. Bill Burney, 2004-01-03

Propylene glycol, used as a humectant and a preservative to extend the shelf life of tobacco and as a carrier for flavorings added to pipe tobacco, is deleterious in several respects. The abundant hydrogen in the molecule combines with oxygen very readily, inducing higher-temperature combustion and production of greater quantities of water, both of which adversely affect smoking properties. The stuff also is sweetish, but with an off-taste that some find quite disagreeable. Whether the overall effect in this realm is a benefit or a detriment is a matter of taste. My personal opinion is that use as a humectant is both unnecessary and deleterious to the smoking qualities of the tobacco, and it should never be used for this purpose. James Beard, 2000-07-02

PG can be added by the retailer to the finished bulk product, or by the blender, or the grower, or the processor, or the warehouser, or anywhere in between, and in variable quantities. So yes, PG will be found in nearly every pipe tobacco blend available, and for most of us it ain't necessarily a bad thing. Fred Latchaw, 2001-12-12

Propylene glycol is not the evil chemical that some believe it to be, but, like anything else, it can be abused, and often is in "cheap" tobaccos. Glycerin, glycerol and alcohol were widely used in the past in flavoring tobaccos. Why so much of the industry switched to PG is a question that can PROBABLY be answered by economics.

In a relatively pure state, PG is viscous, and somewhat slimy to the touch. It binds readily with water, and is often used in humidifying units in cigar humidors to maintain a fairly constant relative humidity of about 70%, considered ideal by many. It has a distinctive sweet taste and substantially lower toxicity than ethylene- and diethylene glycols, but high ingested doses have correlated with hepatic and renal diseases. Don't drink it. If your tobacco is sticky, and it won't dry out, you've probably got a good dose of PG present. It's also found in oil-free salad dressings, and a lot of cosmetics.

And, no, I don't use it, though tested samples of some ingredient leaf have shown small amounts present. GL Pease, 2001-12-14

PG, or propylene glycol is a viscous, oily liquid that is a common additive in food stuffs and tobacco. It is hygroscopic in that it has a tendency to "exist" at approximately 70% relative humidity. When combined with plain old ordinary water and held in suspension in, say, oasis foam, a relatively stable humidistat is formed. When the relative humidity drops below 70%, the water bond is "broken" and the water is "released" into the surrounding environment. When the humidity level rises above 70% water is absorbed from the environment and bound to the PG.
Tobacco can act as the lattice that holds the PG solution. A little bit of PG is not really capable of holding 70%, but it is capable of locking in some moisture. From a manufacturer's point of view, this can help perpetuate the integrity of a product that may wind up sitting in warehouse, transit, or on a shelf for an indeterminate period of time. Kudos to the manufacturer who does their best to insure that you get a properly moisturized, consistent product every time.

PG is also used as a flavor carrier. Since the PG will draw in moisture from the surrounding environment, many manufacturers will flavor tobaccos using PG as a "carrier". A flavoring agent is combined with water or other solution and then combined with an amount of PG. The subsequent solution is then combined with dry tobacco and the result is that the flavor is drawn into the tobacco mixture as opposed to just being sprayed or poured on. Jeff Folloder, 2000-08-26

References And Further Reading

The Pipe Rack has lots of vintage and limited edition tobacco tins for sale. Check them out.

The USENET group alt.smokers.pipes is the source of a great deal of information, and spirited discussion on all of these topics and many more.

GL Pease's FAQ, Aging Section. Highly recommended. Much of the material here is a different version of the information posted in this set of answers.

RC Hamlin's tobacco aging article from Pipes Digest. A bit older, but also recommended. Lots of solid advice.

The Ottawa Pipe Club cellaring page. Another good presentation of the topic, with a variety of perspectives.

Toren Smith's aging experiment results, discussing various containers and storage observations. Long and good!

Steven Fowler's report on mason jar aging discusses results of his storage protocol.

Vegas Smokes gives their take on the top 5 aging questions.

Barry Levin's tobacco evaluation article from Pipes Digest in 1995 contains a section on aging.

Aging and storage information from Dan Pipe which doesn't necessarily agree, in many respects, with a lot of the information presented here. But it's still worth reading, to get a complete picture of some of the points of controversy in the community.

Material pertaining to the aging of cigars and other forms of tobacco exists. Here's a selection:
alt.smokers.cigars' FAQ covers a variety of aging and storage topics. Good reading!

The Cigar Hut has a respectable FAQ covering aging and storage issues, as well.

Steve Saka's essay on cigar aging. Interesting for its aging milestone list.

**Contributors and Credits**

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This FAQ concerns clay pipes. This is a dynamic document subject to change. If you have an addition, revision, or deletion that you think needs to be taken, post your thoughts on this thread. The FAQ's will be posted weekly. The source of this FAQ is from an archived version dated about February 2005.

Visit the ASP website at http://www.aspipes.com/ for a version that is easier to read and print.

The following is the complete text of Kevyn Winkless' classic post on clay pipes.
Clay Pipe Introduction

The subject of clay pipes seems to receive a lukewarm welcome on ASP; a handful like them, a handful don't, and most people seem not to have much (if any) experience with them. However, I think that this is yet another world of experiences for pipe smokers, and for a variety of reasons every pipe smoker really ought to have one or two of them. Here's a guide I'm in the process of writing. I hope it helps you in your foray into clay pipes!

History

Clay pipes first appear in Europe and in the archaeological record of early European colonies in the Americas during the 16th century. Tobacco was an especially common commodity in England, France, Holland and Spain during the early colonial period. A wide variety of styles have been tried, but the ones that have endured are mostly essentially the same: a longish stem, usually straight or very slightly curved, ending in a flared, usually conical bowl. Clay pipes are normally made in one piece, however there was a little experimentation in a few regions (notably Ireland and South Africa) with composite pipes combining clay bowls with stems made from other materials, such as horn. As these composite pipes turn up quite late (19th century and early 20th) and follow patterns that are common in briar pipes, it seems likely that these were attempts by pipe smokers of limited resources to reproduce the briar pipes they liked in a material they could afford.

At first, all clay pipes were hand made by craftsmen using press moulds and soft clay. In the 18th century, as the price of tobacco reached levels that made it more accessible to the common man, production started to shift toward slip casting in plaster moulds. Press casting continued, however, to be the process of choice for those who wanted a quality pipe.

Clay pipes were smoked regularly by people as diverse as sailors, explorers in the New World, and by the nobility in the Old World, and are a reasonably common find in archaeological sites that date later than 1550.

The main reason that clay pipes have been more or less abandoned at present is the sheer affordability of briar during the first part of the 20th century, and the association of the cheap slip-cast pipes with poverty. In later decades, good briar started to become a little more difficult to find, but the clay pipe making industry had already more or less died out, and at the present time, despite their advantages, clay pipes are a novelty rather than the norm.
**Why Choose Clay?**

Currently, pipes made from wood, especially briar, are the most popular type of pipe. However, clay pipes were quite popular for many years, and in fact for a long time were the only type of pipe available in Europe for the smoking of tobacco. The advantages of briar are numerous, and generally fairly well known by the pipe smoking community. Many people seem to be unaware of the advantages of clay, however.

1. **Clay pipes are more forgiving:**

   — The material from which they are made is not flammable, so one need not be concerned if one has a habit of smoking too hot. Burnout is impossible.

   — Since clay pipes tend to have longer stems, have a higher specific heat (meaning they can absorb more heat) and radiate heat more readily than briar, even if one is smoking too hot and hard, it is unlikely that tongue bite will be an issue for most tobaccos (some tobaccos would bite you even if you just sprinkled them on an incense brazier, however).

   — Ceramic suffers abuse more stoically than either briar or meerschaum. While it is true that clay pipes are brittle, and unlikely to survive a fall or a sharp blow, it is vanishingly unlikely that you will damage your pipe through over-vigorous application of your pipe tool.

2. Clay pipes do not seem to require any break-in period or seasoning to smoke well. No cake is necessary, and the material being incapable of burning while you smoke it does not influence the flavor of the tobacco. While a seasoned clay pipe does smoke a little better than a fresh one, the difference is not a great one, and a new clay pipe comes essentially "ready to rock" with whatever tobacco you choose to put in it.

3. The absence of any foreign material (burning briar, flavors from the curing oil in meerschaum) in your smoke will result in a brighter, clearer flavor, making clay pipes an excellent way to sample new tobaccos or simply to rediscover an old favorite. While smoking a given tobacco in a well cured pipe does add a certain something, it is sometimes nice to get nothing but the taste of the tobacco in question. This is particularly true if you are going to be smoking "pure" tobaccos, such as a straight Virginia or Oriental. Some people also find the spice and exotic flavors of Latakia and Perique fuller in a clay pipe, probably due to less absorption into the walls of the pipe bowl.
4. Since clay pipes can be cleaned completely, or nearly so (see Fire Cleaning), they can be used to try completely unfamiliar tobaccos without risking wood or meerschaum pipes, which can have a long memory for particularly intense flavors. If the experiment was a failure, and you truly loathe the tobacco in question, you need only fire clean the clay and it will return to pristine condition, ready for your next foray into the unknown. For this reason, clay pipes are also excellent for experimenting with non-tobacco smokes such as sage, corn husks, Indian tea and the like. While you might not like the experience, one sometimes gets that curious feeling "what would that be like in a pipe?", especially about things that smell good while they are burning. It's nice to have a pipe about that can be used for such an experiment without worrying about ruining it.

5. Quality clay pipes are much cheaper than briar or meerschaum pipes in the same class, since both the material and the labor involved is much less. This makes clay pipes an excellent addition to the collection of any pipe smoker who needs to pad his or her rotation, but doesn't have the money to spend on the quality of briar pipe he or she likes.

Types of Clay Pipe

When you purchase your first clay pipe, it is important to know that there are two distinct types of clay pipe: slip cast and press cast.

Slip cast pipes are made by pouring a fairly fluid mixture of clay and water (called slip) into an absorbent mould (usually plaster). A certain amount of the clay clings to the inside of the mould as water is absorbed by the mould; the excess is poured out. The mould is then dried for a few hours or a few days before it is cracked open, at which point the slightly damp clay pipe is trimmed, dried further, then fired before use.

Press cast pipes are made from solid clay. First, a rod is rolled out from a ball of clay, leaving a small bulb with a rod extending from it. A wire or similar object is carefully driven down the length of the rod until just before reaching the bulb. The entire thing is then placed in the mould, and a shaping device is pressed into the bowl part of the mould to force the bulb into the correct shape. The wire is then pushed all the way through into the bowl, the pipe is dried for an hour or two, removed from the mould, dried further, then fired before use.

In general, the clay pipes you see most often in catalogues and pipe shops are the slip cast variety, as these are the easiest to make and also the cheapest, so they represent a very small risk
to the vendor - remember that most people don't smoke clay these days, so vendors usually carry them mostly for novelty value.

When you purchase a clay pipe, you should inspect it for the following qualities:

— seam lines
— pits
— airway (esp the entry into the bowl)
— chips or cracks

Slip cast pipes will usually have marked seam lines. These are the weakest part of the pipe, and sometimes begin to separate during firing or as the pipe begins to age. Press cast pipes often have no seam lines, or seams that are very difficult to make out. In the case of press cast pipes, the seams do not indicate any weakness, but do indicate that the maker wasn't very conscientious with regard to the finishing touches, and the price should reflect this.

Pits in the surface of the pipe indicate that it was press cast, and can indicate weak points in the clay. Clays that have been mishandled during shipping may also have developed chips or cracks. During the heat stress of smoking or cleaning, these are the points that are most likely to give way. A pipe with these flaws is still smokable, but you may want to buy a different pipe if the chips etc are in vital spots such as large flaws on the bowl or cracks/chips at the point where the bowl meets the stem. Chips at the end of the bit and around the rim of the bowl are just an aesthetic problem, however, and you needn't worry about them provided you are paying a very good price for the pipe.

The airway of a clay pipe is a sticky problem. Press cast clay will shrink approximately 20% during the drying and firing process, while slip cast clay will sometimes shrink as much as 35%. This makes it very difficult for the manufacturer to judge the size of the airway before the pipe is complete. Many clay pipes (especially slip cast pipes) have their airway restricted to the point of being unable to pass a pipe cleaner through them. As clay pipes don't often need that sort of thing while smoking, it shouldn't pose a problem for you, and shouldn't prevent you from buying the pipe. If, however, you tend to prefer blends that typically smoke wet (heavy aromatics and such) you may want to do the pipe cleaner test on any clays before buying them. Remember however that clay is very absorbent (especially slip cast) and that not only the bowl but the whole stem will work to absorb moisture while you smoke. The main issue will be cleaning, which I will cover in a moment. You also need to be sure that there are no obstructions in the airway that will restrict draw unreasonably.
It's unlikely you will get a complete obstruction, but slip-cast pipes sometimes have an uneven interior, depending on the process used by the manufacturer. The easiest way to test the airway of a clay pipe is to run a length of florists' wire down the stem - if it meets any resistance at all, you have an obstruction. Usually, the obstruction will be small and easily removed by gentle pressure from the wire. If it doesn't move with gentle pressure, you will need to gauge where in the stem the obstruction lies, and if it is at least 5 or 6 cm from the bowl you should be able to shorten the stem so that the portion including the obstruction is removed.

In addition to the main airway, however, you need to pay special attention to its entry into the bowl. Sometimes this entry is partially obstructed, and this can usually be cleared easily by picking at it with a pipe tool or some other hard, narrow object (needles and nails work well). If it is a press cast pipe, the wire used to make the airway sometimes fails to make it all the way through to the bowl, in which case there is really nothing to be done.

All of the above flaws can be problematic, but remember: they *are* flaws, and if you didn't notice them before purchase it's almost certain your vendor or the manufacturer will replace it with no problem. It's also useful to remember that briar has flaws too. These are different flaws from the ones usually encountered in briar, but there aren't any more of them, really.

In addition to the basic slip cast vs. press cast distinction, it should be noted that some clay pipes have been glazed. A glazed pipe will have the characteristic glassy surface of your fine china. A glaze pipe can be very attractive, since it is a good way to permit more intricate and durable decoration. However, it should be noted that there are some difficulties with glazed pipes:

— if the inside of the bowl is glazed, the pipe may not be smokable. The airway may be completely blocked by glaze, which would require a needle file to remove. Other than this, it is likely that a pipe that has been completely glazed, inside and out, will not smoke like a clay pipe at all, but more like a glass pipe. This is because the interior glaze prevents the clay from absorbing moisture and tars as you smoke. A glazed pipe will require more thorough cleaning of the stem as well.

— even if the inside of the bowl is not glazed, glazed ceramics of this sort are often made from porcelain clay which is much denser and less porous than the usual sort of clay used for pipe making. This will cause problems similar to those found in a pipe with the interior glazed, and means that cleaning will probably not be able to return the pipe to nearly new appearance.

— glazes are generally fired at a much lower temperature than the clay was originally fired. If the temperature was low enough, fire cleaning may cause the glaze to sag, run, crackle or discolor. If the vendor doesn't know for certain, you can hazard a guess: porcelain clays (very fine grained, white clays that produce a dense, light ceramic when fired) and stoneware clays are fired at very high temperatures, and the glazes used with them are similarly hardy at high
temperatures. Standard kiln cleaning might not bother them (though of course you will still be taking a risk) and other forms of fire cleaning probably won't. If the clay appears quite porous (like a flower pot) then it was probably fired at a lower temperature, meaning that the glazes were fired at a lower temperature still. Such a pipe will survive fire cleaning, but the glaze will probably be ruined.

On the whole, due to the uncertainties a glazed pipe may well be best left as a display piece. However, I have personally made clay pipes *and* glazed them, and they have worked well. The issue is not whether or not glazed pipes work for smoking, but whether the manufacturer really had smoking in mind when the pipe was made. A pipe that is clearly intended as a display piece will probably not smoke well, and may suffer when you attempt to do any comprehensive cleaning. A pipe that is very decorative, but appears to have been designed for actual use will probably smoke as well as any other clay pipe and will not pose any problems when cleaning it. As usual, caveat emptor.

**Where to Buy Clay Pipes**

Unfortunately, clay pipes are rather difficult to come by at present, however they are available if you know where to look. Clays appear to be more popular in Europe following a resurgence of historical recreation in the 1990s, and can often be found in the catalogues of large pipe and tobacco companies such as Dan Pipe.

There are also a number of individuals who make press cast pipes, usually replicas of historical pipes, and many of these people have web pages from which you can order. Usually, such operations are quite small, and the vendor may or may not accept credit cards.

Another place you may find replica pipes is in museum shops or the gift shops of historical villages (the type where the staff play the parts of everyday people in a community of a specific period in history). Surprising as it may seem, these pipes, while intended as display pieces, are smokable. The staff of the gift shop may know whether or not the pipe was actually made in the historical village, and if it was it is likely to be quite genuine. If not, it will of course depend on whether the manufacturer intended to make something pretty for your gew-gaw shelf or a pipe.

Finally, some pipe shops do stock clay pipes, though due to problems finding other suppliers these are often slip cast pipes. You local vendor may be able to order some clay pipes for you, particularly if you guarantee to buy three or four of them.
Preparing to Smoke

There isn't really much that needs to be done to a clay pipe before you can just pack it up and smoke it. First, you need to check the bowl to ensure there are no objects sitting in it. Sometimes new pipes have a slight dusting of clay dust from the manufacturer, and this can be removed with a slightly damp cloth if you've a mind to. Unless there's an awful lot of it, it shouldn't bother you though. Some manufacturers dip the bit of their pipes in sealing wax to provide a slightly more comfortable grip between your teeth. If you like, you can remove this by gently scraping it with a knife, then holding it in a flame until it burns off. You will be left with a charred bit, but this will wear off with use or during the first fire cleaning.

Packing a Clay Pipe

It is important to note that while packing your clay pipe, you should not hold it by the stem. Grasp the base of the bowl between your index finger and thumb while packing. Grasping any kind of pipe by the bowl is generally a good idea when packing it, but the smaller, fragile-looking bowls of a clay pipe often make people nervous. There is really no need for this, provided you grip the bowl by the base and not the lip and don't squeeze too hard. It's no different from being able to hold a glass without it shattering in your grip. Just loosen up and let your fingers figure out the best grip by themselves.

The process of packing a clay pipe is basically identical to what you would use with a briar. Some people advocate packing more loosely, feeling that clay pipes smoke hotter than briar. They do sometimes smoke a little hotter, but not very much, and actually I have personally found that packing more loosely exacerbates the problem. If you pack your pipe a little more tightly than usual (not too much of course) you will find that taking long, slow draws (like blowing up a balloon in reverse) will keep the pipe lit and at about the right temperature. You will also avoid bite. Many briar smokers complain of bite when smoking clay, but I personally think that this derives from the looser pack that is optimum in a briar. The clay of the pipe gets much hotter than a briar, and helps to keep the tobacco itself smoldering at lower temperatures. Wood has a lower specific heat than fired clay does, so the wood tends to be a little cooler than the ember in a briar pipe. Clay, on the other hand, can sit at the burning temperature of the tobacco without any danger of burning itself. It also radiates heat better than briar (which is why it gets so hot to the touch while smoking) which should mean that the bottom of the bowl and the stem will be much cooler than the parts nearer the ember - probably almost room temperature - and will help to cool the smoke before it reaches your mouth.
As the pack is a bit tighter, I like to roll up a ball of tobacco and stick it in the bottom of the pipe before packing so as to ensure an air space near the bottom. This assists in the draw and can reduce moisture as well. You may also find it useful to use your pipe tool's pick to lever the tobacco up and away from the walls of the bowl after each tamping in order to encourage good airflow.

Rope, twist, flake, navy cake, cube cut and similarly dense types of tobacco smoke *extremely* well in a clay.

**Smoking Your Clay**

Lighting should proceed as normal for your briars. As most clay pipes have a stem that is a bit longer than the average briar, you might find the process a bit awkward at first as you adjust, but it should take only 2 or 3 lightings for you to be just as proficient as with your usual pipe. Of course, if you already smoke churchwardens fairly regularly, you should have no trouble at all. An advantage of clay pipes is that they are fire proof. This means that you have many more options for lighting your pipe than with a briar. Candles, flaming twigs, blow torches, coals lifted straight from a fire, Bunsen burners, or just sticking your head close enough to the fire to get the bowl in there and puff are all options. Some require more caution than others, though, so watch it! (grin)

While you are smoking your clay, you will probably find tamping to be less necessary than with your briar pipes. Again, this is related to the density of the pack. The denser pack used in clay smolders rather than burning - at first you will probably need to relight more than in a briar, but as you get the hang of it you may find that your clay pipes smoke more smoothly. I personally often have days where I'm "in the zone" and never need to relight my clays once I've got them going. I rarely have this experience with my briars. During this process, tamping serves the purpose of encouraging the ember rather than breaking down the ash. When it looks like my pipe might die out, I sometimes break up the ember with my pick and spread it over the surface of the tobacco before puffing things up and tamping gently to get things going.

While you are smoking, it is not wise to handle the bowl ... unless you have asbestos fingers. The bowl will get quite hot, certainly much hotter than a briar and hotter than meerschaum too. The best way to hold a clay pipe with a stem of any length is to rest the stem on your ring finger, curling your index and middle fingers over top. Once you have found the pipe's center of gravity, this method becomes effortless. Pipes with shorter stems are generally intended to be clamped in the mouth, but if you don't like to use your teeth while smoking you can hold the part of the stem
closest to the bowl between your thumb and forefinger and rest the stem on the knuckles of your other fingers. Many pipes with shorter stems are equipped with a "dewdrop" hanging either from the bottom of the bowl or at the point where the bowl and stem meet - this is intended for gripping, and on a well designed pipe will stay remarkably cool during the course of a smoke.

### Cleaning

This is the part that turns most people off clay pipe smoking, even though it really isn't as problematic as they think.

As with a briar, once the smoke is finished, empty out the ashes and dottle. Clay pipes don't require a cake, and can actually suffer from the presence of one if it is allowed to grow much so you might want to wipe the inside of the bowl once it has cooled a little. If the stem has a large enough airway, run a pipe cleaner through. If a pipe cleaner doesn't go in easily, DON'T force it. You will almost certainly not succeed anyway, and risk snapping the stem. Generally, a clay pipe won't suffer much from not having the stem swabbed out, since the clay seems to absorb and redistribute moisture much better than briar, and certainly better than vulcanite, horn, metal etc as is usually used in briar pipe stems. However, if you are unable to clean the stem mechanically you will wind up fire cleaning more often.

One alternative to pipe cleaners that I have used in the past is a length of florists' wire wrapped with cotton thread. Florists' wire comes in a variety of gauges, so you should have no trouble finding one that will pass through the airway even with the thread wrapped around it. Dip the thread-wrapped end in your cleaning agent of choice (I usually use dark rum or vodka...akvavit in a pinch) and run it back and forth down the stem. You will need to re-wrap the wire from time to time so that your thread is clean. If you can get your hands on the un-waxed, brushed out cotton dental floss, this works really well. It seems to be more absorbent than regular cotton thread.

Note: obviously, polyester and nylon threads won't absorb much if anything, though they will act as a scraper for the inside of the stem; you really are best working with cotton.

Extremely small brushes with long stems are available for cleaning small pieces of lab equipment such as the larger gauge glass tubes. If you can get hold of one of those it should work quite well.
I have also used a long wire with the tip bent over to hold a bundle of threads in place (like a swab/brush) in place of a pipe cleaner. Combined with a solvent such as alcohol it can do quite a good job of cleaning the stem, though it requires more time than a pipe cleaner would.

If you clean carefully between smokes and are careful to avoid wet smoking (complete with gurgle) you may be able to keep your clay going for quite some time before fire cleaning becomes necessary. This will allow you to properly season it, which can improve the smoking qualities of the pipe but it quite a bit more difficult with clay pipes due to the nature of the material.

**Resting and Rotation**

Clay pipes both absorb and release moisture more quickly than briar, and in addition the fact that they are inorganic means that souring is less of a problem. In fact, I have never had a clay pipe go sour in the sense that a briar can.

These qualities of clay mean that a clay pipe can be smoked quite heavily during the course of a day, left to rest over night (possibly longer if the local humidity is high), and then treated in much the same way the next day. While this will definitely increase the frequency with which you find it desirable to fire clean your pipe, you will probably not notice any other adverse effects. If you smoke slowly, are usually able to avoid smoking wet, and are able to swab out the stem after each smoke, you may be able to continue this way indefinitely, especially if you actually have a rotation of 2 or 3 clay pipes to work with. Also, remember that a clay pipe won't burn and doesn't suffer from warping; if you are concerned that your pipe isn't getting enough time to rest (a clay pipe with particularly thick walls may require more drying time, while the less dense slip cast pipes may require less) you can solve the problem simply by placing it on top of a heating vent or even on a tray in the oven. Force drying clay pipes doesn't seem to have any adverse effects.

The fact that clay pipes are so hardy under difficult conditions make them an excellent addition to one's rotation. They allow you to dedicate certain briar pipes to specific tobaccos (taking advantage of the very different properties of wood and the cake that builds in a briar pipe), and yet not have to curtail your smoking even if you haven't got a large collection. Also, if you have a bare minimum rotation of briars, a clay can pick up the slack when you want to rest one pipe a little longer or give it a more thorough cleaning.
Fire Cleaning

From time to time, you will probably find that the sheer quantity of tar and other nasty things that have accumulated in the porous material of a clay pipe will result in a much decreased absorbency and thus wetter smokes, complete with the occasional quantity of "pipe juice" coming up the stem and into your mouth. The flavor of your tobacco will be marred, you will often be spitting tar and juices out, and the increased moisture will increase the chances of bite. This is when you need to clean the pipe more thoroughly, and the best method is baptism by fire.

Ideally, if you have access to a gas kiln, either in your own home or through a friend, or even by hiring space at a commercial ceramic supply shop, re-firing your pipe is the perfect cleaning. The pipe is placed in the kiln, and heated to a temperature below the one it was originally fired to, but high enough to drive out and burn all the chemicals that have accumulated in the clay (cones 03 and 02 has worked for me in the past, but it is best to consult with someone who knows what they are doing and can judge what kind of firing the pipe originally went through). This is the only way to thoroughly clean your clay pipe, but unfortunately all seasoning is also lost: when the process is finished, the pipe will be almost like new. It will have regained so much absorbency that you will feel it clinging to your fingers and lips when you smoke it for the first time!

As I said, this is the ideal situation, but not everyone has access to a kiln, and of course if you don't have a number of pipes to clean simultaneously it might not be cost effective. There are other methods you might find more convenient:

— putting your pipe in the oven, with the rack as high as possible, then putting the oven on "self clean" can sometimes do the trick. You won't get as clean a pipe as from a kiln, but it will certainly set back the clock. The disadvantage of this if you have an electric oven is that the tars might not actually combust, but simply evaporate, in which case you may end up with a slight residue on the elements and other surfaces in the oven. The effect will only be slight, but you might detect a slight smoke smell while cooking in the future. If you happen to have a self-cleaning gas oven (I've only ever seen one of these in my entire life - whether they were anything but a failed experiment I don't know), you should have no problem, as the gas burners will consume the residue more completely and drive what is left out through the exhaust. When the self-clean cycle is done, your pipe will be as clean as it can get from this method.

— if you have a gas oven with a grill, or a gas barbeque, you can place your pipes as close to the flame as possible, light the gas, close the lid/door and leave it alone for a while. Cleaning will take at least 20 minutes, and may take as long as an hour depending on how hot your grill actually gets. Depending on the arrangement, you may want to turn the pipe from time to time to ensure even cleaning.
— a very traditional way of cleaning your pipe, and the only one that actually contributes to the seasoning in my opinion, is to place it in a fire. Carefully arrange your pipe in the fire, then rake glowing coals overtop. (I like to get coals into the bowl, too) Your pipe is now completely surrounded on all sides by burning material. Typically, one will need to leave the pipe in the fire quite some time (I generally just leave it there until the fire burns out) and it won't appear as clean due to the accumulation of soot and such on the outer surface, but a campfire cleaned pipe has a special something about it that needs to be tried to be understood.

— this is the riskiest method, in my opinion: manually immersing your pipe in a flame such as that from a Bunsen burner, blowtorch or even the gas burners of your stove or oven. You need to take extreme care not to burn yourself as the temperatures involved are high enough to do some serious damage. Keep a close eye your clothes and other dangling objects to avoid the risk of fire. In all, though, to a sensible person using this method, the greatest risk is not to himself but to his pipe. If you are not careful to heat the pipe evenly, you will get differential expansion and this may result in cracking or spalling. While the effects may not be immediately visible, small stress fractures within the body of the pipe may make it more and more fragile until at some point it may snap in your hands as you tamp or pack the pipe. If you can't get the whole pipe into the flame, then you should run it smoothly back and forth to ensure even coverage. While some recommend that you heat the clay until it begins to glow, this isn't really necessary. You will be able to watch the clay get cleaner and cleaner, and if it doesn't seem to be changing at all, simply move it more slowly through the flame to increase the average temperature.

**Other Cleaning Methods**

Having given very serious thought to alternate methods of cleaning my clay pipes, it has occurred to me that since the clay itself would not be at risk the way briar would, soaking might in fact be the answer. I have soaked pipes in boiling water, salt water, boiling salt water, and vodka. Boiling salted water was reasonably successful, though it took some time and needed to be watched, which is far from optimal. Vodka also worked reasonably well, though it took much longer than the boiling method. I think that heated alcohol, and possibly a higher concentration would work more quickly. I wish I still had access to lab facilities so I could try it without having to worry too much about flashpoints. Acetone would likely work nicely, but I'm leery of using anything on my pipes that I wouldn't put in my mouth. I plan to experiment with vinegar (organic acids can be excellent tar solvents) and vinegar/salt solutions.
Thus far, none of the solvent methods I’ve tried has been satisfactory, but neither have they shown any sign of damaging the pipes. As with most things, YMMV.

Clay pipes can also be cleaned on the top rack of your dishwasher if you so desire. You should wash your pipe alone, however, as the residues are quite strong smelling and may permeate any plastic or wooden items included at the same time. I also recommend putting the pipe in one of those little plastic cages you can get for washing small objects to avoid damage from the pipe being battered around inside the dishwasher. Such a cleaning is, however, superficial. It will remove deposits from the outside of the pipe, and from the bowl, but will not be very effective on deposits in the stem. Dishwashers do not get hot enough to drive out the materials that have been absorbed into the clay of your pipe. Frankly, the risk to your pipe probably outweighs the advantages of this method.
This FAQ concerns the DGT practice. This is a dynamic document subject to change. If you have an addition, revision, or deletion that you think needs to be taken, post your thoughts on this thread. The FAQ's will be posted weekly. The source of this FAQ is from an archived version dated about February 2005.

Visit the ASP website at http://www.aspipes.com/ for a version that is easier to read and print.

Most of this information comes from the ASP posts of Mike Jacobs, with additional material by Kevyn Winkless, Terry Freeman, and Paul Szabady.

What is DGT?

DGT stands for Delayed Gratification Technique, a (somewhat) humorous term for leaving a bowl half-smoked and picking it up later. With a little technique, the tobacco at the bottom of the bowl is "stoved", and develops a richer taste, with less tongue bite.

How do you DGT?

There are two schools of thought here. Many people will DGT a bowl just by setting it down and forgetting about it. Others go to great lengths to prepare the bowl. These "great lengths" are what this FAQ is about. The only thing one needs to do with a DGT is smoke the bowl slowly, to avoid the build-
up of alkaline moisture. But to get the most striking results from this experiment, there are more detailed methods.

People get the best results by smoking down to about the two-thirds mark. They avoid tamping the tobacco. At some point, preferably before putting the pipe down, the ash needs to be dumped out, leaving only a little kindling on top, and the stem and shank need to be run-through with a pipe cleaner.

Whichever method is used, the bowl should be left for anywhere from a few hours to a few days. Overnight is usual.

Some suggest storing the DGT’d pipe with a pipe cleaner in the airhole, and some suggest resting the bowl upside down, to keep the moisture from collecting at the bottom. This all depends on how obsessive one is. The most important step is removing the ash, as an ashy bowl tends to have a bitter taste.

**Which tobaccos work best?**

Almost any tobacco is a candidate, but people have the best luck with Virginia tobacco, especially milder blends. A Virginia/perique blend works almost as well. Some people claim that burley and Latakia blends can work too. The only tobaccos you really shouldn't try this with are aromatics, as the toppings will usually end up tasting nasty.

**Which Virginia tobaccos would you recommend?**

Brindle Flake, Ashton  
Golden Danish Slices, Lane  
Blackwoods Flake, McClelland  
Dark Star, McClelland  
Hal O’ The Wynd, Rattray  
Marlin Flake, Rattray  
Full Virginia Flake, Samuel Gawith
This FAQ concerns information about Virginia tobacco. This is a dynamic document subject to change. If you have an addition, revision, or deletion that you think needs to be taken, post your thoughts on this thread. The FAQ's will be posted weekly. The source of this FAQ is from an archived version dated about February 2005.

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Much of this information comes from the ASP posts of Greg Pease and Paul Szabady, and from Jon Tillman's Tobacco Reviews site, with additional material from the ASP posts of Chase Turner, Bear Graves, Sykes Wilford, Steve Thomas, Mike Jacobs, Greg Sprinkle, Tapio Pentikainen, Art Ruppelt, Tarek Manadily, Michael McCormick, George Miller, Joshua Rosenblatt, Neal Mille, and Ray Roewert.

**What Are The Characteristics of Virginia Tobacco?**

VA's are complex and delicate. When smoked poorly, they can taste like hot air, but with good smoking technique they can span a range of tastes, and are usually sweet, tangy and fruit-like. VA's are more prone to cause tongue-bite than any other tobacco, so there are a number of reasons to practice good technique with these blends.

Unlike most tobaccos, VA's improve toward the bottom of the bowl. A slow smoke will stove the bottom layers of tobacco, deepening the flavors and reducing the chance of tongue bite.
What Are The Different Varieties of VA?

Virginiass are referred to in a number of different ways. A "bright" VA is named as such because it's taken from the top of the plant, where the highest quality leaf is.

VA's can also be referred to by their colors. The most common color grades are lemon, golden, and red. Ignoring a great many factors (such as climate, soil, and time of harvest), the color of a VA relates to its sugar content. Tobacco that is cured longer (and is thus darker in color) will be less sweet than a tobacco cured quickly.

Stoved VA's are also referred to separately. Stoving (the process of literally cooking the tobacco) darkens a tobacco and changes its taste, usually reducing tongue bite. Incidentally, VA's with the most sugar will darken the most.

Where Is Virginia Grown?

VA's are grown all over the world. In the United States, the various Virginia-producing regions are referred to as "Belts", but this tobacco can be found in countries like Canada, Brazil, India, China, and the African countries of Tanzania, Malawi, and especially Zimbabwe. This last country, in fact, accounts for much of the world's VA production.

As stated before, location (soil, climate, etc.) will greatly affect the flavor and character of any tobacco. It is not necessarily true, though, that the best VA's come from the United States, or from the state of Virginia.

What Are Some Popular VA Blends?

*** Straight VA's ***
Brindle Flake, Ashton
No. 109 Virginia Flake, Astley's
Royal Vintage Golden Cake, Butera
Hamborger Veermaster, Dan Tobacco
Light Flake, Dunhill
Kingsbridge, Esoterica Tobacciana
Peacehaven, Esoterica Tobacciana
Virginia #1, Mac Baren
Blackwoods Flake, McClelland
Bulk No. 2010 Classic Virginia, McClelland
Bulk No. 2035 Dark Navy Flake, McClelland
Bulk No. 5100 Red Cake, McClelland
Christmas Cheer, McClelland
Dark Star, McClelland
Virginia No. 22, McClelland
Virginia No. 27, McClelland
Virginia Woods, McClelland
Red Ribbon, McCranie's
Brown Clunee, Rattray
Hal O’ The Wynd, Rattray
Marlin Flake, Rattray
Best Brown Flake, Samuel Gawith
Full Virginia Flake, Samuel Gawith
Grousemoor, Samuel Gawith

*** Other VA's ***
Escudo Navy Deluxe, A&C Petersen (VA/Perique)
Black Parrot, Ashton (VA/Perique)
Three Nuns, Bell's (VA/Perique)
Elizabethan Mixture, Dunhill (VA/Perique)
Dorchester, Esoterica Tobacciana (VA/Perique)
Tilbury, Esoterica Tobacciana (VA/burley)
Cairo, GL Pease (VA/oriental/Perique)
Haddo's Delight, GL Pease (VA/Perique)
Arcadia, McClelland (VA/oriental)
Bulk No. 2015 Virginia Flake, McClelland (VA/Perique)
Bulk No. 5115 Old World Classic Cake, McClelland (VA/light fruit topping)
Deep Hollow, McClelland (VA/vanilla topping)
St. James Woods, McClelland (VA/Perique)
Club Blend, Mac Baren (VA/cavendish)
Dark Twist, Mac Baren (VA/cavendish)
Roll Cake, Mac Baren (VA/cavendish/Perique)
This FAQ concerns information about Perique tobacco. This is a dynamic document subject to change. If you have an addition, revision, or deletion that you think needs to be taken, post your thoughts on this thread. The FAQ's will be posted weekly. The source of this FAQ is from an archived version dated about February 2005.

Visit the ASP website at http://www.aspipes.com/ for a version that is easier to read and print.

Most of the information for this FAQ comes from the Nichols and Brown home page, with additional information from the Perique web site by Gerard Faucheux, the New Orleans Times-Picayune (thanks to ASP member Daniel D. Marsalone), and the archived ASP posts of Irwin Friedman, Ray Newton, and Robert Holmes.

What Are the Characteristics of Perique?

Perique is a spice tobacco, usually used in Virginia blends. It has a dark, oily appearance, and a taste of pepper and figs. Its flavor is very strong, so it isn't usually found in high percentages in a blend. It can be smoked straight, but isn't intended to be.

Its role as a complement to VA's is not just because of its flavor. Being acidic, it tends to alleviate alkaline tongue bite, which is so often a problem with Virginia tobacco.
What is the History of Perique?

The process by which this tobacco is produced pre-dates Columbus. The Choctaw Indians of (what would later be) Louisiana would make it by pressing it into hollow logs with a long pole, and securing it with weights.

After the Acadians (Cajuns) settled the area in the mid-1700's, the Choctaws taught this process to a French colonist by the name of Pierre Chenet. The finished product was referred to as Perique, a Cajun variation on the word "prick". This referred either to the phallic shape of the carottes (the tight bundles of market-ready Perique), or Chenet himself, as it was his nickname!

Where is Perique Grown?

The only place in the world Perique can be grown is in a small section of Louisiana called St. James Parish. Inside St. James Parish, the best location for growing (and the only place it's grown now) is a very small area called Grande Pointe Ridge, which can be found in the town of Paulina. This is due to both the climate, and the unusual soil of the area, which is referred to as "Magnolia" soil. Nourished by the swamps that surround Grande Pointe, Magnolia is a dark and highly fertile alluvial soil.

The actual strain of tobacco can vary, although tobacco that isn't native to the soils of Louisiana doesn't yield a good product. Supposedly the most common strain used with Perique is something called "red burley".

St. James Perique is extremely rare, so the tobacco is produced elsewhere to meet demands, though without the same results. Kentucky Green River Burley is most commonly used to make Perique. This particular version is the Perique that most pipe smokers are familiar with.

How Is Perique Made?

At harvest time, the wilted leaves of the tobacco are hung up to dry for two weeks, stripped of hard veins, and packed into bundles (called torquettes). These torquettes are put into barrels under extreme pressure, and allowed to cure in their own juices (which collect as run-off at the top of the barrels). Over the course of many months, these bundles are periodically "turned", and
then placed again under pressure in the barrels. Without any air to interact with the tobacco, Perique ferments anaerobically, producing the distinctive taste.

**Is Perique Endangered?**

There is only one farm left that produces this leaf full-time: Percy Martin Farms in Grande Pointe Ridge, Louisiana. After two bad crop years in the late 1990's, there was a distinct possibility that Percy Martin would stop producing it also. But a partnership was formed in 1999 between Martin and New Orleans company Nichols and Brown, bringing badly needed stability to this tiny market.

With interest from cigarette manufacturers, as well as from pipe tobacco companies, it's possible that other farmers in Grande Pointe Ridge will begin growing Perique, though for the moment its future is uncertain. As a low-return, labor-intensive product, it doesn't appeal to most farmers.

**Where Can I Buy Perique?**

Bulk perique can be purchased anywhere that offers blending tobaccos. Some commonly-known retailers of blending tobaccos are as follows:

- Cornell and Diehl
- Vegas Smokes
- Tobacco Direct

Stephen Lawrence, in a recent ASP post reprinted an email from Nichols & Brown explaining how to order the real stuff.

**What Are Some Popular Perique Blends?**

- Escudo Navy Deluxe, A&C Petersen
- Black Parrot, Ashton
- No. 2 Virginia Mixture, Astley's
- Three Nuns, Bell's
Kingfisher, Butera
Elizabethan Mixture, Dunhill
Dorchester, Esoterica Tobacciana
Dunbar, Esoterica Tobacciana
Haddo's Delight, G.L. Pease
Roll Cake, Mac Baren
Bulk No. 2015 Virginia Flake, McClelland
St. James Woods, McClelland
633, Solani
Frequently Asked Questions

Oriental Tobacco

This FAQ concerns information about Oriental tobacco. This is a dynamic document subject to change. If you have an addition, revision, or deletion that you think needs to be taken, post your thoughts on this thread. The FAQ's will be posted weekly. The source of this FAQ is from an archived version dated about February 2005.

Visit the ASP website at http://www.aspipes.com/ for a version that is easier to read and print.

Most of this information comes from the ASP posts of Greg Pease, and Jon Tillman's Tobacco Reviews database. Additional material comes from the ASP posts of Michael Lindner, Paul Szabady, Bob Weiske, Lance Sang, Terry Freeman, Terry McGinty, Michael Lovell, Mike Gervais, Robert Crim, Mike Cox, Mark Peeples, J.W. Davis, Pascal Essers, and Ed Anderson.

What Are the Characteristics of Oriental Tobacco?

Oriental, or Turkish, is a spice tobacco known for its nutty, somewhat "sweet and sour" flavor. It's a main component in English blends, along with Latakia (which is itself an Oriental that's been flavored with smoke).

This tobacco derives its name from the area in which it's grown: the Eastern Mediterranean. Each of the varietals, in fact, are named after the towns or regions they come from. Thus Yenidje and Smyrna are Greek, Samsun and Izmir are Turkish, Drama is Macedonian, and Xanthe is from the region of Thrace, which is mostly in Greece. For all intents are purposes this is all one region,
united for many years under Turkish rule (hence the interchangeable terms "Oriental" and "Turkish").

Oriental tobacco plants characteristically have a great deal of small leaves. The finished product ranges in color from yellow to brown, and is strongly aromatic. Its smell is reminiscent of used horse bedding, which could possibly explain why it's often mixed with Latakia.

**Where Can I Find the Different Varietals?**

Turkish varietals, unfortunately, are no longer available, even to professional blenders. Cigarette companies snap up most of the Turkish leaf production, and the remainder is made into a generic Turkish blend. This is the Oriental tobacco (often referred to as "basma") that one finds either in bulk, or in ready-made blends.

**What Are Some Popular Oriental Blends?**

**Oriental Blends Without Latakia**
- Premier Cru, A&C Petersen
- Pebblecut, Ashton
- Royal Vintage Blended Flake, Butera
- Yorkshire, Clan Shaw
- Midnight Ride, Dan Tobacco
- Early Morning Pipe, Dunhill
- Cairo, GL Pease
- Arcadia, McClelland
- Bulk No. 2025 English Cavendish, McClelland
- Bulk No. 2045 Oriental Mixture, McClelland
- Bulk No. 2050 Oriental Cavendish Mix, McClelland
- Red Raparee, Rattray
**Oriental Blends With Latakia**

Old Dog, Ashton
Balkan Sasieni, Balkan Sasieni
Original Mixture, Balkan Sobranie
Latakia No. 1, Butera
Pelican, Butera
Royal Vintage Latakia No. 2, Butera
Caravan, GL Pease
Renaissance, GL Pease
Bombay Court, McClelland
Bulk No. 2020 Matured Cake, McClelland
Bulk No. 2030 #1 Grade Balkan, McClelland
Frog Morton On The Town, McClelland
Oriental No. 12, McClelland
Oriental No. 14, McClelland