

Seems to be drawn from <https://www.reddit.com/r/PipeTobacco/wiki/index>

## Beginner Basics

### **I want to start smoking, what do I need?**

You need a pipe, an ignition source, tobacco, and a tamper, as well as pipe cleaners for cleaning the pipe afterwards.

### **What kind of pipe should I get? What matters in a pipe?**

There are several primary materials that are used. Corn cobs are cheap and smoke well. They tend to absorb liquid and so provide a dry smoke, and are very forgiving of poor packing and poor technique. Since they are cheap, it's not such a problem if you smoke hot and burn one out, scorch the rim with your lighter as you learn to light properly, or stomp on it in frustration when you don't get a good smoke! Briar is by far the most common wood used to make pipes, though you can find pipes made of olive wood, morta (petrified oak), and pear wood (cheaper, doesn't last as long). Meerschaum is a stone product with interesting properties, and many artists carve very intricate patterns or figures out of it, but it is fragile. It colors beautifully over time, and doesn't tend to "ghost" or hang onto old flavors as much as briar. Clay is also an option. It gets very hot to hold, but you can hold the pipe by the stem. It's easy to clean in an oven (self-clean cycle) or fireplace, and is relatively cheap, but again, it is fragile and can break. It does provide a very cool, dry smoke, though.

Corn cobs are great starter pipes. Missouri Meerschaum makes the definitive corn cob pipes, as well as "Ozark" hardwood pipes (maple or cherry), for cheap (<\$10). Many have filters, and many briar pipes, especially less expensive pipes, also have filters. They only last a couple of bowls at most, and need to be changed. They aren't required to be used, and you can easily remove them and choose not to use them if you like. However, the draw (airway) of a cob is very large and open without the filter, and can result in bits of tobacco getting into your mouth. It won't hurt you, but some people find that unpleasant.

An "expensive" cob is better than a cheap wood pipe, briar or not, unless you get the Missouri Meerschaum Ozark Hardwood pipes. Those are just like cobs, but in wood, and they're great. Even a cheap cob will smoke

quite well, especially compared to much more expensive briar. At a minimum, expect to spend US\$50 on a decent briar wood pipe. US\$80 is even better. You will buy these more expensive pipes shortly anyway, so do yourself a favor and start with something good.

You can find good pipes cheap, but it's harder to find good cheap pipes. Common inexpensive briar pipes are Rossi (by Savinelli), Savinelli's lower end, and Stanwell's lower end pipes. Many well-known carvers are now selling lower end "hand finished" or even hand made pipes in common, easy to make shapes and finishes that are (relatively) inexpensive (\$75-\$150) and very high quality.

The \$20 pipes on Amazon usually aren't very good. \$20 "basket" pipes from a local shop are better, and are usually brand name pipes that failed quality control for their aesthetics, not their function. Check a basket pipe by holding it up and checking that the stem to shank junction looks nice and tight with no large gaps of space. Check the draft hole at the bottom of the bowl. It should be centered and entering the bowl at the very bottom. If it isn't, the pipe probably won't smoke well. If it's not strongly bent, it should easily pass a pipe cleaner unless it has a "stinger", filter, or other built-in device to help prevent gurgle. Most of these devices are gimmicks and not really needed. They make the pipe harder to clean.

There are many older estate (used) pipes that you can buy cheap that smoke very well. Grabow, Kaywoodie, Mastercraft, GBD and other well-known common brands made decent pipes decades ago, and can be found all over for \$5-\$10 (requiring some work to clean and prep them) to \$25-\$75 (fully restored and ready to smoke).

Straight pipes are generally easier to smoke, and are suggested for beginners. Bent pipes are harder to clean and have a stronger tendency to build up liquid and "gurgle" during the smoke. If that happens with a straight pipe, you can run a clean, dry pipe cleaner down the stem from the bit end (the mouth) to the bowl. This will absorb the liquid. You can do this any time, even in the middle of smoking a bowl. With a bent bowl, you can also do this, but depending on the shape it may be difficult or impossible to pass a pipe cleaner all the way to the bowl. Churchwardens are popular, but generally do not smoke well at all. They tend to gurgle, and are harder to clean. A good Churchwarden will be more expensive than a comparable (or better) regular pipe. They are not recommended for beginners, though

there is nothing inherently wrong with the design of a Churchwarden. Missouri Meerschaum does make a “Cobbit” line of corn cob churchwardens that are inexpensive (\$20) and very good smokers.

### **What should I buy for my first pipe? How much should I expect to pay?**

Well, this is a tricky question that is mainly up to you. Many would recommend a corncob for your first pipe, since they're cheap and you won't lose a lot of money if you decide pipes aren't for you. If you'd like to get a briar, expect to pay 60+ dollars for a popular brand name. You can find pipes for cheaper, but most of the brands you will hear about on the sub-reddit are in this 60-120 dollar range. Around 70-90 is the average for most of the popular brands, in this writer's experience.

There are a lot of great places online to purchase pipes and tobaccos. Several places that folks have used and generally recommend (in no particular order) are:

- Smokingpipes.com
- 4 Noggins
- Pipes and Cigars
- Cup O' Joe's
- L.J. Peretti
- Iwan Ries
- Pipe Divan
- Al Pascia
- The Pipe Guys
- The Danish Pipe Shop
- Missouri Meerschaum

### **What kind of tobacco should I get?**

You should get 3 different types of tobacco. An English, a Virginia or non-aromatic, and an aromatic blend. Keep in mind that any blend from these styles will not represent the whole of the style, but it will give you variety and allow you to figure out what you like and don't like.

There are three major categories of tobacco: English, Virginia and aromatic. There are other special categories, but these are the most common. Also, there are different cuts or styles of tobacco. Ribbon or

“ready rubbed” is shredded tobacco that’s usually easiest to get burning for new smokers. Krumble Kakes are ready rubbed tobaccos that have been compressed. They are easy to carry and break apart / rub out easily. Coins and flakes are pressed collections of whole leaves that are rolled or compressed into cubes and then sliced. Some people just fold and stuff them into their pipes, while others slice them across the grain into tiny cubes, and still others rub them out into ribbons. They usually need to be dried quite a bit before smoking. There are also “broken flake” tobaccos, which come from flakes but are mechanically shredded a little bit before packaging. They still have large chunks of compressed flakes in the tin. Finally, rope/twist and plug tobaccos are what coins and flakes are sliced from, but these are sold without slicing. They are very compact and travel well, but need a lot more preparation.

Aromatics smell great, but don't usually taste as good. They can be hard to smoke well because they are very wet and get very hot. People think they are good to start with because they are sweet, but really they are better left until after you work on your technique a while. It is very rare, and very difficult, to find an aromatic that tastes the way it smells. Some at least start with better quality tobacco, which means they taste better even if they don't taste like the flavors you smell in the bag/tin. A few examples of include Lane 1Q, a ribbon cut vanilla aromatic that is considered the most popular tobacco in the world, Macbaren Vanilla Cream, a broken flake made with very high quality tobacco, Cult Blood Red Moon, a dark wet ribbon cut that tastes of chocolate and cherry (like a cherry cordial), and C&D Autumn Evening, a ribbon cut maple and rum blend with a wonderful flavor throughout.

English tobaccos usually smell like a campfire or a good whiskey because they generally have a smoky fire-cured tobacco called latakia in them. They are typically easy to smoke, stay lit well, and are flavorful, but you have to like the smoky latakia (very similar to liking smoky Scotch Whisky). Some blends are stronger than others both in terms of bold flavors (from latakia and burley) and from nicotine, and some mild latakia blends are great for starting out. Dunhill makes a very well-regarded series of English tobaccos, ranging from light to heavy: Early Morning Pipe, London Mixture, My Mixture 965, and Nightcap to name a few. Samuel Gawith Squadron Leader is also an excellent example of an English blend with Latakia.

Virginia includes blends that mix it with other tobaccos like burley (earthy), perique (sweet and/or peppery), orientals and others. There are different kinds of Virginias, too (red, gold, bright, dark fired, etc). They tend to be grassy or hay like, and sweeter. They sometimes come as pressed flakes or coins, or even ropes instead of loosely cut ribbons. They can be hot and somewhat challenging to smoke, but very rewarding. The sweetness is natural, as opposed to aromatics which have added coatings and flavorings. Virginias cover the broadest range of styles or preparations, from ribbons to plugs and ropes. McClelland 5100 Red Cake is a wonderful, relatively easy to smoke straight Virginia. Dunhill Elizabethan is a ribbon cut Virginia/Perique blend that is also quite easy to smoke and a good representative of those flavors. Samuel Gawith Best Brown Flake (medium) and Full Virginia Flake (full-bodied) are very highly-regarded straight Virginias, but can be challenging for beginners to learn to smoke well.

By the way, don't discount the classic "drug store" or "over the counter" blends of tobacco that have been around for a long time. Carter Hall is a high quality classic that's inexpensive and delicious. It's a burley and Virginia blend with some nice earthy cocoa notes from the burley and sweetness from the Virginia. Prince Albert and Sir Walter Raleigh are some more classic, easy to smoke, good starter tobaccos.

Below is a list of recommended tobaccos, put together by our community. Keep in mind, this represents a very very small portion of the tobaccos out there. This is merely a jumping off point. The only way to really find great tobacco is to explore!

**Virginia** - 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.

- Erinmore Flake: Light and floral, subtle fruit and hay flavors
- Orlik Golden Sliced: Smells of fresh cut hay. Taste reminds me of orange, mint, hay, and cologne at times
- McClelland 5100 Red Cake: Darker fruit flavors, rich honey
- Dunhill Flake: Light and rich, citrus lemon flavors, flavorful grassy

notes

- Peterson Irish Oak: Rich and full, sour fruit notes, woody undertones, subtle sherry flavors
- Peterson Sherlock Holmes: A mellower Virginia, light citrus flavors like orange. Mild and tangy
- GL Pease Montgomery: A rich flavorful blend. Hay flavors, with cocoa and wine. Some wood undertones

**Aromatic** - A good aromatic tobacco is lightly topped with a natural flavoring of whatever the blender chooses. Cherry, vanilla, honey, etc are common flavors but the possibilities are virtually infinite.

- Lane 1Q: Rich warm sweetness, crisp hay notes, subtle but delicious vanilla flavors
- Dan's Blue Note: Sweet vanilla flavors, pancake like warmth, some berry
- Mac Baren's 7 Seas Regular: Smells of chocolate covered raisins and has a room note that is second to none
- Lane RLP-6: Sweet, sugar cookie aroma and flavor with some hints of chocolate and molasses
- Dan's Devil's Holiday: Strong Berry flavor that manages not to be very soupy or chemically tasting
- Cornell & Diehl Autumn Evening: Cavendish and virginia, and tastes like rum and maple. Great room note
- Boswell's Christmas Cookie: Very Pleasant Vanilla Cookie flavor. This will definitely please everyone in the room as well as the serious smoker

**English** - An English blend has a significant portion of Virginia backing up the Latakia, and orientals serve as a spice. Latakia is a specially prepared tobacco originally produced in Syria and named after the port city of Latakia. Now the tobacco is mainly produced in Cyprus. It is cured over a stone pine or oak wood fire, which gives it an intense smoky-peppery taste and smell. Too strong to smoke straight, it's used as a "condiment".

- Dunhill Nightcap: Full bodied, cool burning. Smokey and earthy flavors, spicy and peppery on the finish
- McClelland Frog Morton: The simplest possible English. Subtle smokiness

- Frog Morton variations": On the town, on the bayou, across the pond, and the newly added "cellar" which is an aromatic english.
- Samuel Gawith Skiff Mixture: Cool and very nutty, rounded out with meaty smoke flavors
- Samuel Gawith Squadron Leader": A less spicy version of nightcap, with more nuttiness. A mellow middle of the road tobacco, but with some complexity
- Dunhill Mixture 965: An old classic, built like an English blend with a good balance of latakia and orientals, but then there's cavendish to give a sort of bitter-sweet note
- Dunhill Early Morning Pipe: Nightcap without the strong bite, somewhat nuttier

Additionally, you might want to explore some **Oriental** blends, such as McClelland's Grand Orientals series or their Oriental Mixture series. These blends contain various tobaccos that are rich, complex and spicy (in the cooking spices sense) without the sometimes overwhelming smokiness of English blends. They are usually fairly dry, are a bit easier to smoke than Virginias, don't bite as much, and have some stronger flavors that may be easier to learn to discern.

Finally, **OTC** (Over the Counter) blends (also called "drug store" blends) are classic tobaccos that have been around a long time and generally come dry, rubbed out and ready to smoke. They are usually predominantly **burley** tobacco, and are easy to light and usually require little technique to smoke well. These include Carter Hall, Prince Albert, Sir Walter Raleigh, Captain Black, and a bunch of others.

For further options, this flowchart gives an excellent breakdown of all of the different flavor paths one can take, and includes some recommendations not featured above.

### **What should I use to light with?**

Any soft flame lighter or matches will work. There is a lot of information about thermodynamic about lighting a pipe and what not, but at the end of the day, pick something you like. I use a variety, depending on where I am and the conditions. Stay away from hard flames or torch lighters because they can burn through the wood.

### **How do I smoke?**

You must first pack your pipe, then light it, and enjoy! Seriously though, there are lots of different packing methods, but the easiest for a beginner is to fill the bowl, tamp or push the tobacco to the half way point, fill again, tamp to the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mark, and then heap the tobacco over a bit and tamp to completely fill. Light it once, the tobacco will rise, tamp it down, light it again and you are on your way. Sometimes you will need to re-light many times, and other times you will only need to relight a couple of times for the duration of the smoke. Tamp the tobacco and embers down as you smoke, try every 5 minutes or so to begin with, and try to keep the top of the tobacco level so that it smokes evenly. The point is to keep the ignited embers close to fresh tobacco. You will also want to keep in mind that you should not be inhaling any smoke. Simply puff the smoke by drawing it into your mouth and blowing it back out. Some people can't understand how this is possible, just try it with a liquid.

### **What do I need to do for aftercare?**

When you have finished smoking, use the shovel side of the tamper to dump the dottle or leftover bits of tobacco, out of the bowl. Run a pipe cleaner through the stem, from mouth piece to the inside of the bowl. Then wipe the inside of the bowl down with a pipe cleaner by bending it in half. Please note that not all pipes will be able to accommodate the pipe cleaner making it through the airway in one shot. Take the stem off after the bowl has cooled and finish cleaning. Do this after every smoke. You can smoke the pipe again after about an hour or two of rest. The bowl has to dry out, and contrary to popular belief a day of rest is not necessary, it was a marketing trick to sell more pipes about 50 years ago.

## **DrScience's guide to pipe cleaning <==click**

### **Is smoking bad for me?**

Yes, yes it is. Pipe smoking has been shown to have much fewer negative effects than almost any other kind of habitual smoking, but it still has its risks, do not take my word for it, though. I am going to depart from my comrades here and I will not link to any studies or statistics about smoking, there are decent amounts of information out there, most of it done in Europe, so research it yourself to fully understand the effects. Otherwise I could just be cherry picking studies I've found and be feeding you bad



information, but you should talk to medical physician about the health effects if you are concerned. The following is thread discussing research that has been done on the subject.

## Terminology:

**Estate Pipe:** A pipe from a previous owner, typically smoked. These pipes can be excellent values, but need to be cleaned inside and usually outside as well.

**Ghost:** a flavor left behind in an estate pipe or even one of your own pipes.

**Tamper:** a tool to push the embers and tobacco down inside of the bowl.

**Bit:** The non-wood portion of the pipe, usually black, which enters your mouth.

**TAD & PAD:** Tobacco acquisition disorder and pipe acquisition disorder. These will become self explanatory in time, or maybe not, but they typically mean that someone has gone overboard on buying pipes or tobacco.

## Packing a bowl

**Three Step Method** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhyAsN9BZsQ>

**Two Step Method** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oFV7yItZ5fo>

**Air Pocket Method** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6M1KXnd73w>

**The "Bob" Method** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xV9VppJzCwx>

**The "Frank" Method** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XrgzFVmurUk>

**The "J.J. Fox" Method** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XHYPso7TX>

**How to deal with Flakes (4 methods)** <http://pipesmagazine.com/blog/pipe-videos/flake-pipe-tobacco-preparation-videos/>

## Tobacco Glossary

**Aromatic:** A pipe tobacco blend, generally mild, and often made up of Burley and Virginia tobaccos, to which either a 'casing' or 'topping' or both is added to flavor the tobacco. Casing refers to a spraying or soaking of an unfinished blend with various flavors to induce a taste prior to conditioning, and topping refers to the spraying of flavoring on a finished tobacco blend. Aromatic blends have added flavorings. If a flavor is added during the curing process, it is called a casing. If a flavor is added after the finished product, it is called a topping. There may not seem like much of a difference between the two; however, the difference is remarkably stark.

Toppings typically fade faster than casings and are relatively docile when being smoked, which means toppings' main purpose is to enhance room note. Cased tobacco can bring nuanced flavors more to the forefront, possibly changing the complexity of a blend entirely (for better and for worse). The base tobacco for an aromatic blend is usually burley or cavendish.

**Cut:** Refers to the manner of shredding, cutting, or otherwise finally preparing tobacco. Affects the preparation and burning of the tobacco. Common cuts include cake, where tobacco is pressed into round molds and must be cut or broken apart before smoking, flake, made by slicing pieces off of large pressed blocks of tobacco, rope, where the tobacco is not cut, but rather spun into thick cords, slices, which are the same as flakes but thicker, broken flakes, which are pieces broken off of cake or flake tobacco into smaller chunks, ribbon cut, where the tobacco is cut into long ribbons, shag, where the tobacco is cut very fine, plug, where the tobacco is pressed and heated into tight rectangles, curly cut, which is made by slicing "coins" from rope tobacco, navy cut, which refers to a process of wrapping tobacco with sweeteners and then cutting it into twists or curlys, and twist, which is much like rope except that it is twisted rather than spun.

**Burley:** is mostly an American tobacco. It has a full but rather neutral flavor to it. It is one of the best base tobaccos for blending out there. Though Burley's are mostly American, another type that has increased in popularity is that of Semois. It is rather unique in flavor but similarly is more burley than anything else. Kentucky is also a type of burley that has been fired.

**Virginia:** tobaccos are grown virtually all over the world. There are dark as well as light colored Virginias, each offering its own unique flavor. Virginias are typically sweet, with bright Virginias being more sour/citrus-like than its brothers. Common descriptive colors given to Virginias is lemon, orange, and/or red. It is bright Virginias that will bite, that is, leave your tongue raw, if one is not careful. Virginia are as numerous as they come. Simply because the tobacco is one of the most versatile. It is for sure the go-to tobacco for many blenders.

**Oriental/Turkish:** tobacco are small leaf varieties grown in the Mediterranean area or rim. Their flavors vary according to region and

varieties but are usually described as "spicy." Part of this has to do with their flavor profile being associated with exotic spices from the East. An example of a sub-variety of Oriental leaf is yenidje (McClelland's Yenidje Highlander).

**Latakia:** is also an oriental tobacco that is cured over hardwood smoke, similar yet different to the process of dark-fired Burley (i.e. Kentucky). Scented woods and spices are often added to the curing process to give the leaf a unique smokey flavor, not unlike that of barbecue. The majority of Latakia in existence today is Cypriot Latakia, with Syrian Latakia no longer being made.

**Perique:** is an exotic tobacco hailing exclusively from St. James Parish, Louisiana. The tobacco is fermented in an old Cajun style learned from the Native Americans to create a uniquely fragrant and nicotine punch tobacco. Perique is the strongest of tobacco leafs available, at least as far as I know, with 5% changing the entire complexity of a blend. It is more of a condiment for most blends, being too strong to smoke alone, but is still easy to find if one's palate is refined. Perique is also known for its pungent aroma.

**Cavendish:** Named for Sir Thomas Cavendish, a late 16th century explorer and privateer who commanded a ship on an expedition to Virginia, where he learned that dipping tobacco leaves in sugar made for a milder smoke. According to Russ Oullette: In the most traditional sense, a Cavendish is made by sweetening and flavoring the component tobaccos and subjecting them to pressure and the leaf may also be subjected to heat prior to, or during the pressing. Sometimes the leaves are dipped in the top-dressing, or they might also be sprayed. Cavendish is the tobacco found most in aromatics. It is most often steam cured with a touch of sugar and other flavor varieties, such as vanilla. Cavendish is remarkably smooth and rounder than most other tobacco leafs. It is key to note that Cavendish is not exactly a type of tobacco but mixture, or method, of tobaccos pressed together. Any tobacco can be used to produce Cavendish, but it is usually made up of Kentucky, burley, and/or Virginia.

**English:** and Balkan blends contain latakia. The two terms, today, are relatively similar in the pipe community, with most probably not knowing the difference. An English blend is more or less latakia/Virginia/+ other stuff,

while Balkans are latakia/orientals/+ other stuff. It becomes hard to describe a blend that has latakia/Virginia/& orientals. As a rule of thumb though, what ever tobacco is most dominant, be it Virginia or oriental (all English/Balkan blends contain latakia), defines whether it will be an English or a Balkan.

**Burley blends:** are, generally speaking, flavored burley. Old labels, such as Prince Albert, Carter Hall, and Sir Walter Raleigh, are burley blends. Within such blends are also the likes of Virginia and cavendish leaf but to a lighter degree (most of the time). These are the types of blends least likely to bite your tongue. Nothing special really but still a good old-fashioned smoke.

**VaPer:** is a portmanteau for a blend of Virginia and Perique. The combination of spicy and sweet, as well as its strength, is what makes such blends so appealing. Perique somewhat takes away the bite of the Virginia. Virginia and VaPer blends have some of the most loyal advocates, often buying out droves of stock in order to fill their cellars.

**Shag:** is an incredibly fine cut tobacco.

**Curly:** (or spun-cut and navy cut) is thin, coin-like slices of tobacco cut from twisted "rope" tobacco.

**Flakes:** are cut from compressed cakes, such as plug, into rectangular slices.

**Plugs:** are square/rectangular bars cut from tobacco that has been layered, heated, and pressed.

**Ribbon cut:** tobacco is tobacco that has been mechanically or methodically cut from cakes/plugs into thin strands. The cut, however, is not as thin as shag.

**Rope:** tobacco is not cut, rather it is spun into thick cords and sold in varying lengths. It is not a common cut or press but it once was.

**Broken flakes:** are, like regular flakes, cut from cakes/plugs into irregular pieces.

**Cubed:** tobacco is pressed tobacco that has been cut into fine, coarse cube-shaped pieces. They are thick, chunky pieces that tend to burn slow. Most often found in burley blends.

**Crumble cakes:** are cut tobaccos that have been pressed. This differs than other types of cuts, such as plug or even just round cakes, because the already cut tobacco makes it easy for the cake to fall apart. When rubbed out, the result is small pieces of tobacco ready for filling.

**Balkan:** While largely considered to be a marketing term without a traditional meaning, the term "Balkan" is generally used to refer to a pipe tobacco blend containing latakia, but relying on oriental tobacco as the more prevalent note in the blend.

**Birdseye:** Also Bird's-Eye, refers to a pattern in the grain of briar or other wood which is circular in nature, resulting from localized distortions in the grain. The small circles are said to resemble the eyes of a bird.

**Bit:** The portion of the stem meant to be held in the smoker's mouth. Also referred to as the mouthpiece.

**Bite Zone:** The last approximately three quarters of an inch of a pipe stem, including the button.

**Button:** The portion of the bit which sits higher than the remainder of the stem in order to permit the pipe to be held in the teeth or lips.

**Cake:** A mixture of carbon, unburnt tobacco, sugars, oils, and tar which accumulates on the inside walls of a pipe. Generally preferred in a pipe in order to provide a layer of heat protection. Removed by the process of reaming the pipe, and preferably kept at approximately the thickness of a dime. The process of "breaking-in" a pipe refers to the building of cake in the pipe initially.

**Dottle:** Refers to the compressed plug of unburnt tobacco left at the bottom of a pipe bowl after it is smoked and emptied.

**Ghost:** A term used to refer to a taste or smell of a particular tobacco blend

or topping which remains in the pipe through subsequent bowls and affects their taste. Generally removed with a treatment of salt and alcohol.

**Lucite:** A material used for pipe stem making, lucite is a solid plastic made of the same material as plexiglass. Generally these stems retain their finish and cosmetic appearance longer, but are harder on the smoker's teeth.

**Mouthpiece:** See bit.

**Shank:** The portion of a pipe which connects the bowl and stem, generally made of the same material as the bowl.

**Slot:** The generally horizontal slit cut into the end of a pipe stem, or button.

**Stem:** See Also Bit, Mouthpiece The shaft of a pipe extending out of the shank. Generally made of vulcanite or acrylic, but sometimes made of plastic, wood, or other materials. The shaft of the pipe includes the bit, or mouthpiece, and in many cases also a tenon which fits into the shank.

**Stinger:** or sometimes called a condenser. hardest part of basic pipe design is drilling a air channel with no variances in size or direction. The failure to do this causes either the smoke to be able to expand, which by Boyle's law will yield a drop in temperature, which leads to condensation from the gas, and turbulence can do much the same. If you want to make an effective pipe and not spend the money to drill like the carriage trade makers do, then you have to do something about the condensation. One way is the porous material, often called a "filter" (not technically true unless the gas passes through the material), which catches the moisture Paper, charcoal, balsa wood, rock maple wood, meerschaum, clay pellets have all been used for this purpose. The stinger/condenser uses a metal piece to trap it before it enters the stem. Stingers may be immovable, they may push in/pull out, or they may be screw in. The permanent ones are a pain to clean, they generally will not pass a pipe cleaner. The other two are easier to clean. if you take them out or in some cases cut the head off of the permanent ones, beware failure to keep your pipe clean and it is likely to remind you in most distasteful ways.

**Stummel:** German for stump. Used to refer to the bowl and shank of a tobacco pipe, most often used when referring to a cut but unfinished pipe.

**System Pipe:** The other way to handle the problem is the "well" of the "system pipe". Made famous by the Peterson pipes (but made by many manufacturers), the system pipe deliberately has an expansion chamber and a "well" to collect the condensation. This only works in a bent pipe, because gravity has to pull the gunk out of the path. While a good many of these will have a military mount, not all system pipes have the military mount, and not all military mounts are system pipes. [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/d/d8/Peterson\\_cutaway.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/d/d8/Peterson_cutaway.jpg)[2] system pipes work well, but require special cleaning care, for you want to clean out the "well" AND you also need to clean out the air channel to the bottom of the bowl.

**Tongue Bite:** Essentially a chemical burn on the tongue experienced on occasion by pipe smokers, often new ones. Usually caused by smoking too quickly, but can also be caused by particular tobacco blends or flavorings to which the smoker has a bad reaction.

## **Troubleshooting**

You've smoked your first pipe and have decided to continue on, but things aren't going smoothly. This guide is for you. To the newest of smokers, smoking a pipe at first is awkward and a bit embarrassing, there is no grace of striking a match and getting the perfect light, you struggle to not burn your fingers or light your hair on fire. This is all normal, on to the questions.

### **I hear people telling me to break in my pipe, what should I do?**

Smoke it. No need to put rum, honey, or anything else on the inside of the bowl. There is no need to fill the bowl to specific levels in order to break it in, or smoke it all the way through. The carbon deposit along the inside of the bowl known as cake will form as you smoke. Burning through the side of the bowl, the reasoning for special break in methods, is extremely rare. There are no cheat codes for a good cake, it must be earned over time and will make your pipe all that more special to you.

### **My pipe is making a gurgling sound, what is this?**

Your pipe is either not absorbing the liquid produced from smoking because the carbon layer has not been built up yet, or you are smoking a soggy, most likely aromatic blend. Some say that it may be from smoking too quickly, and this may be true to blends that have a tendency to be on the wet side. Run a pipe cleaner through the stem all the way into the chamber of the pipe, and remove. This should solve the problem

regardless of the cause. If your pipe cleaner does not go all the way through, DO NOT REMOVE the stem while the bowl is warm. It very well may become warped because it is hot and under strain from being removed.

**I'm smoking, but there doesn't seem to be very much smoke, what's wrong?**

Nothing, pipes smoke at different rates through at the bowl. Enjoy the light puffing during this time, some people enjoy the entire bowl this way and it greatly increases the amount of time for a smoke.

**I have lit my pipe a few times in a row, and it won't stay lit, what's wrong?**

You may have too much ash on top. Use the shovel side of the tamper to break up the white ash on top, flip the pipe over to dump it, and then re-tamp. Try again, better isn't it? Flipping the pipe over will not dump good tobacco, just the pile of ash. Some never ash there pipes, others doing it frequently, for me it differs based on the blend so remember to experiment and try new things.

**I don't know whether I am smoking too fast or too slowly, how do I tell?**

There is a huge range of possible times in which it takes to finish a bowl, factors like bowl size and type of tobacco are the biggest factors. If you aren't in any discomfort, than you aren't smoking too fast. Some will argue that there is a proper rate to enjoy a pipe, I do not believe this to be true. There also isn't such thing as smoking a pipe too slowly. As long as you are enjoying yourself, you are at the right pace.

**How do I know if my tobacco is too wet or dry?**

Too dry and the smoke will be harsh, too wet and the blend won't stay lit properly, cause tongue bite, and may cause gurgling. To solve this, experiment! For a suspected wet blend, leave a portion about the size of a bowl full out for 20-60 minutes and see if it smokes better. Too dry and you need to moisten it by putting it inside of a container, and then draping a wet cloth or paper towel over the container. Do not let it touch the tobacco, just being that close will humidify the air and allow it to moisten the tobacco. I find that soggy blends are more of a problem than dry blends.

**I can't smoke the bowl all the way down, what should I do?**

No worries, dump the ash as mentioned in the previous question, and then simply let your pipe sit until you are ready to smoke again. It can be anywhere from a day to a couple weeks later before you finish it, there shouldn't be any problems. This is how I first discovered that drying some



blends out will allow them to smoke better.

**I feel light headed/hungry/anything else that you don't normally feel like, when I am smoking, is this normal?**

Nicotine can have different effects on different people. Try having something to eat and drink especially, your blood sugar may drop from the nicotine, and you need to replenish your supplies. Relax, you don't have to man up and get through the pipe! It's about relaxing and enjoying yourself.

**Can I become addicted to pipe smoking?**

Yes, pipe smoking exposes you to nicotine which is a very addictive chemical. With that being said, only you will know what the boundaries are for addiction, and how comfortable you are with them. In my experience, pipe smokers seem to be able to enjoy a pipe on occasion without any addiction issues, while others smoke several times a day, and do not care whether they are addicted or not. It is a risk, and each person is different, so I am only comfortable telling you that it is possible, but I will not say what the likely hood of it occurring is.

**Can I smoke (insert any other substance than pipe tobacco here) in my pipe?**

You shouldn't smoke anything other than pipe tobacco in your pipe. Cigarettes tobacco won't burn properly, herbs can leave bad residues, and weed will junk up your nice pipe. Of course you can do whatever you want, but I recommend buying a glass or metal pipe to experiment with any other legal or illegal substance, they seem to be much more popular and widely used than briar, and that is for a reason.

## **INTERMEDIATE CONCEPTS**

This portion should be used to reference to as you go. It will be difficult to understand this portion if you have yet to smoke, but it is here so new smokers can begin to build a foundation for greater understanding.

**Why am I packing my pipe and smoking this way?**

The point of all of this is to allow the tobacco to burn at an even and consistent rate. The proper amount of pressure during a tamp or packing will keep the tobacco close enough that the pieces will ignite each other, but not smother each other. There is a happy medium between contact and air flow which is made harder to achieve by the fact that most blends have quite a few different types of leafs. Just try your best and don't become

frustrated if you have to relight often. You'll figure out the best method on your own.

### **What are features to look for in pipes?**

The most obvious in my opinion is the amount of bend in a pipe. Simply and sometimes incorrectly put, the more bend, the lighter the pipe feels in your mouth. Other factors that distort this are the weight of the pipe, the length of the pipe, and the type of bit it has. A wider or smaller width at the portion of the bit may be more comfortable for some than others. The habit of clenching vs. holding the pipe while smoking also determines what features to look for in a pipe. The tobacco chamber itself has two features, depth and width. A deeper pipe will smoke for longer than a pipe with equal width. Conventionally, the width of the pipe matters in regard to the blend. Narrower bowls are typically better for blends with high amounts of Virginia's, while wider bowls allow for more flavor with English blends. This may vary by user and smoke style, so don't take it too seriously.

For briar pipes, the grain is important aesthetically, but does not affect the smoking quality. Before I say anything else, what you prefer in grain is more important than anything else. As far as the market is concerned, in general pipes made from plateaux are better than pipes made from ebauchon blocks. The difference is that Plateau blocks come from the outermost portion of the briar, and ideally has straight grain running vertically up the pipe and the top of the bowl has birds eye. Ebauchon has a mix of bird's eye and straight grain all over.

For non-briar pipes, there is no longer a concern for the quality of the grain. Some people enjoy corn cob pipes for their low price point as well as other features. Some like Meerschaum pipes because they turn from white to yellow, brown, and amber over the course of months and years of smoking. They are on average a bit more expensive than briar pipes, as well as more delicate. Find a material(s) you like and enjoy. I can't tell you what about a pipe will allow it to smoke well or what you will enjoy the most, you have to figure it out.

### **What should I look for in a tobacco blend?**

A blend should deliver a pleasant smoking experience via a nice flavor, a smoke that does not irritate you or cause very much tongue bite, and how well it stays lit. The flavor aspect is completely personal, but as a whole, aromatics don't have strong flavors but have sweeter flavors, English blends are fuller and smokier flavors, and Virginia's as well as other non-

aromatics have flavors that run from sweet to smoky to grassy, but they are typically more natural flavors than aromatics in regards to sweetness. The harshness of a smoke is how much it irritates you; it may cause you to cough or comes out too hot for your liking. Tongue bite is the effect on your tongue, its symptoms vary, but a burning feeling on the tongue or in the mouth is the most common complaint. I will go into greater detail about tongue bite later. You can acquire tobacco from your local tobacconist, or try the following brands, GL Pease , Hearth & Home, MacBaren, McClelland, , Samuel Gawith, and many others. Please note that I am in no way affiliated with any of these brands, and they are ordered alphabetically, not by preference or any other attribute for that matter.

### **How should I store my tobacco?**

Don't leave it open or out in the air for long periods of time, unless you want it to dry out. Most agree that for anything shorter than a couple months, the tin or bag you got the tobacco in should suffice. As you get more into the hobby you may look to glass jars to store your tobacco in. These have an aesthetic quality to them that a lot of people like, as well as keeping the container air tight, so as not to allow flavors to escape, or for the tobacco to dry out. Others see it as, "if it ain't broke, don't fix it", meaning that separate jars are over kill in their opinion. You decide!

### **What features should I look for in a lighter?**

The community seems to prefer matches, but they are the least practical. Butane and other soft flame lighters are very common and can be used more readily. Zippos are also widely used, but some complain about them imparting a flavor. My advice is to try them all and find something you like. I do caution against hard flames and torch lighters because I have seen some pipe ruined by them, but it is for the user to decide what is best.

### **Why am I having discomfort while smoking?**

This can be caused by tongue bite, and as mentioned earlier, it is when you experience discomfort on your tongue or within your mouth in general. Tongue bite can be the result of smoking a blend too fast or too hot, if this is the case try slowing things down. Tongue bite can also be caused by different types of blends, aromatics are sometimes known to deliver more tongue bite, the type of leaf, some people have bad reactions from one type of leaf, while others may find them to deliver cool smokes. Personally, burleys are the spawn of Satan, they destroy my tongue. Others find them

to be cool smoking, what's important here is that you pay attention to which blends cause the discomfort and the ingredients as well as the type of blend. Also try to drink something while smoking, non-alcoholic is preferred because alcohol is known to increase the damage done to you by smoking. Alcohol increases the damage done to your mouth due to the fact that it breaks down the natural protective lining within your mouth, drastically increasing the damage done by smoking.

### **What about the non-smoking aspect of pipe smoking?**

There are a lot of different practices for cleaning a pipe, getting rid of a sour taste, ridding an estate of a ghost, carving your own pipe, blending your own tobacco, storing your pipes and the list goes on. I will leave you to discover this with trial and error and research. One day I may make another guide, but I don't want to overwhelm you with factors that are secondary to enjoying a nice smoke in my opinion.

### **What are all the types of pipes available?**

All pipes fall into one of a few categories: corncob, briar, meerschaum, clay, composite, and glass.

A Chart of various pipe shapes can be found [here](#).

**Briar** is the standard for a great tobacco pipe. Briar is a very dense, very heat resistant wood which comes from the roots of trees and has been used in pipe making for ages. A few of the most popular and respected brands are Peterson, Savanelli, Erik Nording, the list goes on and on. Briar is classic and dependable. You can find briar pipes on many online retailers or by going into your local tobacconist. Once you become more experienced and delve deeper into the world of pipe tobacco, experimenting and enjoying different blends, it will be a good idea to purchase various pipes. When tobacco is smoked from a pipe, it leaves a trace of itself behind in the form of a cake of carbon on the inside of the bowl. This will in turn leave an effect known as "ghosting" and will be tasted faintly on every bowl smoked. Experienced pipe smokers usually have at least one pipe for aromatic and one for english (more on these later) blends but commonly will have a pipe for every individual blend of tobacco.

**Meerschaum** is a soft white mineral that is carved into beautiful and sought after pipes. Unlike Briar and Corncob pipes, these do not develop a cake

and will always be clean inside. Over time they will develop a tinge of a creamy color. They are proven to provide a cool and flavorful smoke however, they are usually more expensive than a briar pipe.

**Clay** pipes are very simple in appearance. They tend to smoke hot and while smoking, the bowl could become so hot that you touching it is unpleasant, so they are commonly held by the stem.

**Composite** pipes look like briar but they aren't actually real wood. They are commonly avoided in the pipe smoking world. Be sure that your pipe is briar before purchase.

**Glass** No matter what head shops tell you, they are only for trees. Don't smoke tobacco from one.

**If you are more of a visual learner...** There is a decent video series with multiple parts explaining the beginnings of pipe smoking here

## How to Identify Quality Pipes

Quality is a subjective term. Over the years many of the "Quality" pipe makers went out of business. Their brand names and trademark, and pipe designs were sold to some of the bigger pipe companies, and now many of the named pipe brands all come from the same factories. Additionally most of the bigger "Quality" pipe brands have secondary Companies. You used to be able to judge a pipe by it's Company Reputation of Quality. There are a few Single Brand makers out there that are truly high Quality. There are also the smaller individual Carvers that live and die by their Quality. My General Rules are as follows:

- The Pipe Cleaner test: The cleaner needs to pass through the bit into the bowl straight through or with a minimum of wiggle
- The thumb rule: I like a bowl that is wide enough and deep enough to hold most of my thumb, and it needs to rotate around my thumb easily.
- Bowl walls: Should be at least 1/4 an inch in thickness, or if it is an apple, brandy, prince, ball shape or any shape that comes to a taper at the bowl top, it needs to have some decent thickness around the sides and bottom.

- Flaws: I try to look for as few flaws in the briar, a few pin fills are not bad, but any major fills are to be avoided. They can heat at a different rate as briar and work themselves loose and break the pipe.
- Stem: When it comes to stems I look for a good even fit, and it needs to be flush and a solid connection. You are looking for a clean line where the stem meets the shank, with little or no rounding of the lines. Vulcanite is softer to the teeth but it oxidizes and takes maintenance, Lucite is very pretty but harder on the bite clamp but is easier to maintain and doesn't oxidize.
- Estate Pipes: When buying an Estate pipe on eBay or from a B&M store or from someone, is the bowl lip clean and even, has the pipe been reamed evenly, is the bit lightly marked with teeth chatter marks, or is it highly abused and chewed, is the stem oxidized or polished, is the stem Vulcanite or Lucite (some folks have a pref on which ones they like to smoke) Vulcanite is softer to the teeth but it oxidizes and takes maintenance, Lucite is very pretty but harder on the bite clamp but is easier to maintain and doesn't oxidize.

Here is a detailed guide to refurbishing and cleaning your estate pipes.

Some of the Old School Brands of Quality are Dunhill, Comoy, GBD, Charatan, Sir Jacopo, BARI, Ben Wade, Loewe, Randy Wiley, Savinelli, Peterson, Edwards, Parker Hardcastle, Jobey, Astley's, Nording, Kaywoodie, Barling, BBB, Brebbia, Castello, Preben Holm, Sasieni, and many, many more.

Starting with a Corn Cob is a good way to go. Doctor Grabow are not all that bad, but they are a Drugstore pipe and you get what you pay for there. You can chase Estate pipes on eBay and get a hell of a deal for anywhere from 10\$ to 50\$ and get pipes that were worth several hundred dollars when they were new, but you can also buy junk. You learn as you go, and develop experience.

We all chase the perfect pipe and the latest one we buy usually we will swear smokes the best, until we see a new beauty in the B&M or online. That is what makes this hobby so fun and exciting.

## Trading?

We have monthly trades here at r/pipetobacco. The process is as follows: Near the beginning of each month, a thread will be set up where you can sign up to be a part of the trade. Upon indicating that you indeed want to be a part of the trade for X month, your name will be put into a hat and at a designated time, pairs will be drawn. Once the pairs are established, another thread will be started indicating the trade partners. From there it is up to the trade partners to contact each other, trade addresses and decide how they want to perform the trade. The only minimum on the trade is a 1oz pouch. This will allow partners to split a 2oz bag. Once you make a successful trade, post pics of your loot! If it is you or your partners first trade, PM the mods with a link to the post made by the opposite partner indicating that the trade was in fact made and flair will be given out in the form of a + next to your name. The + tells of your legitimacy within comments, its much like a cult.

### Here are Pipe/Tobacco reviews

- Tobacco review archive
- Tobacco Review Template
- DrScience11's Guide to Tasting Tobacco
- DrScience11's Guide to Reviewing Tobacco
- Pipe Review Template

## Product Codes & Tin Age

Some manufacturers make it easy by actually listing a date on the tin. Unfortunately, some don't.

### Scandinavian Tobacco Group:

First and second digits are the year -- 13 = 2013 Third and fourth digits are the month -- 09 = September Fifth and sixth digits are the day -- 11 = the eleventh day of the month Last four digits are the production line identifier.

Source: <http://redd.it/2210ju>

### McClelland:

There's generally a number printed on the bottom of the tin. The last two digits are the year of production (usually -- note that Christmas Cheer 2017 was actually produced in 2016, but is printed with a 17). Some McClelland

tins have obvious dates (like the mentioned CC2017 which says "07 2017"), but some have other digits. The last two are still the year.

### **Samuel Gawith**

Gawith uses a day/month system, but the month identifier is counting up the number of months since November of 1995 (month #1). So 09/240 is the 9th of November, 2015. 01/255 is the 1st of February, 2017.

Source: <https://redd.it/6k5iyl>

## **Blending Tobaccos**

What Are The Constituent Tobaccos, and How Do They Work?

**Virginias** usually represent the highest percentage in a blend. Although there's a wide range of Virginias to choose from, including bright VA's, matured VA's, and stoved VA's, in general the lighter the color the tangier the taste, with the darker VA's lending a deep, rich note to the blend. Unprocessed VA's tend to produce tongue bite, and stoved VA's tend to bite much less.

**Burley**, like VA, is a good base tobacco. It has no sugar of its own, but is relatively bite-free. It should never come to the forefront, but be used sparingly. The "Burley Curse" refers to the habit this tobacco has of overpowering a blend. Burley has a distinct nutty taste, but because of its somewhat bland character, is often flavored.

**Cavendish** generally refers to a blend of various tobaccos that have been sweetened, stoved, and pressed. Unflavored black cavendish, for instance, is made from Kentucky Green River burley, which is sugared, steamed and toasted, yielding a distinct caramel flavor. In a blend, cavendish can be used sparingly, to add body or flavor, or become the base, yielding a sweet tobacco. It goes particularly well with Latakia.

**Perique** is a "spice tobacco", with a distinct peppery flavor. Produced mostly in Louisiana from various base tobaccos, and cured in its own juices, this not only adds spice to a VA blend, but also mitigates a lot of the bite that comes with it. When not part of a straight VA/Perique blend, it should only be added to the point that it becomes noticeable. In a regular VA/Perique blend, it can represent a higher percentage, though 10% is often enough.



**Latakia** is Turkish tobacco flavored with smoke. Syrian Latakia is strong and bright, while Cyprian Latakia has a deeper, mellower flavor. This is another spice tobacco, and needs a base tobacco to keep it in check. Fifty percent Latakia would be considered a "heavy Latakia blend". It's generally wise to use less Syrian than Cyprian.

**Oriental** is spice tobacco from the Eastern Mediterranean (countries such as Turkey or Greece). Somewhat akin to Latakia, this is spicy and sweet. Most oriental tobacco is a blend. Even a label that refers to it as one distinct type (such as basma), is usually referring to its main component. Turkish is often used to fill out the general impression of a Latakia. Again, on its own, 50% would be considered a "heavy Oriental".

**Maryland and Carolina** can be thought of as "filler" tobaccos, used mainly to flesh out the taste of a VA or Burley base. Not terribly distinctive, these can be used to mitigate tongue bite.

## What is a Basic Procedure for Blending?

The first thing to do is smoke a little of each individual component, to get a feel for how it will work in the blend. When putting your components together, it's a good idea to work in 16ths, not just because it makes proportions easier, but because working in units of a gram, a finished blend of 16 grams would easily translate to 16 ounces (a pound) later on. A small food scale is important at this stage.

The second step has already been mentioned: to decide on a base. One generally only needs one type of Burley, but with VA, mixing is often required. Brighter VA's are needed for a top-note, but should be balanced by darker, more bottom-noted leaf. Finding a blend that cuts down on tongue bite is important, though burley (or perhaps Maryland or Carolina) can be brought in for that purpose. One technique is to use a finished VA blend as a base, though this takes away from the uniqueness of your own blend.

The next step is to add the spice tobaccos. Latakia and Oriental work well in combination; Latakia and Perique are a much less-used combination. In such a case, one of the two has to dominate. Of course, using only one type of spice tobacco is common practice. With a Latakia blend, it's important to balance the Syrian or Cyprian, or choose between them.

Care should be taken with the cut of the various tobaccos. Constituents of radically different sized cuts will tend to separate. In general, finer cuts encourage consistency and pack easily, but tend to burn hot, which takes away from the flavor. Courser cuts burn slower, and should be incorporated into a blend. As always, balance is the key.

Taking notes throughout this whole process is crucial. If possible, use percentages. A typical percentage for a spice tobacco would be somewhere between 10-20%, while a percentage for a base tobacco could be 50% or higher. Also remember that a blend that tastes good at first may taste radically different over time, as the blend ages and marries.

## How Can I Process My New Blend?

There are basically two things you can do at home: stoving and pressing.

To stove your tobacco, you need to add some moisture to it, and then either put it in the oven, or, preferably, in a crock pot at the lowest setting. A crock pot is less hands-on, and can be put outside, which is good, since the tobacco will give off a foul smell. Constant stirring is important in either case. This process will help take the bite out of a VA, and generally meld and deepen the flavors of a blend.

To press your tobacco, you'll need either a shop press (which most don't have), or a C-clamp and two blocks of wood. If you wrap some of your blend in wax paper and clamp it in between blocks with your C-clamp, after a couple of days you'll have pressed tobacco. This process helps marry the flavors, and can lend richness to your tobacco. Aromatics should never be pressed, though, as the casing would turn your experiment into goop.

Storing your blend should be done with either bale-top jars with rubber O-rings, or canning jars. A blend should age at least a couple of months, in order for the flavors to marry and settle.

[Note: Two methods not discussed here, for lack of information, are steaming and flavoring.]

## 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 and 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.

## 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 highly 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.

## 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?

Virginias 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.

**ADDITIONAL LINKS:**

A comedic text (and especially audio) about starting out in the pipe smoking hobby

Selecting a Pipe Based on How you Smoke

DrScience11 guide to Tasting Tobacco

The Reddit Tobacco Review Archive

Trusted retailers (USA): Pipes and cigars, cupojoes, 4noggins, Smoking Pipes, The Briar Pipe, The Briary

Top Rated eBay estate pipe sellers

Helpful site for identifying your pipes