

SMOKING A PIPE HOW TO GET STARTED

The beginner pipesmoker needs to try out a good range of tobaccos in the early stages. Many potential pipesmokers have given up too quickly through a combination of wrong tobacco, and not appreciating that the experience during the first few times you smoke a new pipe is nothing like the real flavour which the 'broken in' pipe will produce for you. Ask any regular pipesmoker.

So you've got your pipe and appropriate tobacco. Here are some easy steps to perfection.

1. First, pick up your pipe and gently blow through the mouthpiece, to make sure that the airhole is clear.
2. In order to get the full measure of pleasure from your briar pipe, you will need to build up a carbonised lining to the entire bowl interior, which helps insulate the bowl for a cooler, more flavoursome smoke. Nowadays many pipes come from the factory pre-carbonised. However, with most pipes it helps to build up your own carbon lining by carefully smoking five to seven bowlfuls of tobacco with the bowl only half-filled. Over months of smoking this lining will gradually thicken, and should be kept trimmed to about 1/16th of an inch for best results.
3. Filling your pipe is the next – and most important – step. If done properly, your first bowlful should be quite pleasant, but if done incorrectly your pipe may burn hot and bitter. Beware of tongue bite! That stinging, painful sensation on the tip of your tongue, that makes many potential pipesmokers abandon the hobby prematurely. It is caused by not filling the bowl correctly and by using tobacco that is too moist or too dry.

To fill your pipe: holding the pipe upright, trickle in tobacco until overflowing. Tamp down gently and repeat the process two or three more times, until the bowl is full, with a slight springy feel. Draw through the mouthpiece occasionally, to make sure that it is not plugged up.

4. Lighting the pipe should be done with a pipe lighter or wooden matches. The first light is called the 'charring light'. Its purpose is to create a charred 'lid' of tobacco that will hold the second light, move the flame all around the tobacco, igniting it completely, but be careful not to scorch the bowl rim. Once completed, tamp the charred lid down gently.

Now you are ready for the second light. Puff slowly and rhythmically as you 'walk' the flame over the charred tobacco. There! You've done it!

5. Because tobacco is a natural product, it will go out if not puffed regularly so do not be afraid to use numerous matches throughout your course of pipesmoking. And it is only natural to eventually hear (or taste) a little gurgle of moisture in your pipe: this is a by-product of combustion. In addition, some people 'smoke wet' and these natural juices should be immediately removed by running a pipe cleaner down the airhole, retamping the tobacco, and relighting if necessary.
6. It is very important to look after your pipe properly. Taken care of, your pipe will last for many years, improving with age. A pipe for every day of the week is desirable rather than necessary, but certainly two pipes are better than one.

You should never refill a pipe when it is still warm. Clean the stem regularly by the simple process of pushing a pipe cleaner through it.

As mentioned in point 2, the inside of the bowl will over months of smoking acquire a black coating of carbon. This is desirable and will ensure that you get the full flavour of your favourite tobacco. If the coating gets too thick, however, the pipe will start to burn hot. When this happens the coating should be carefully shaved down with a smoker's knife – not an ordinary penknife. You will find that a pipe reamer is a very useful aid to cleaning. Careful treatment and storage of your pipe will prolong its life.

If you require any further help or extra advice please do drop me a line or give me a call.

Robert Good

(We acknowledge the help of the Pipe smokers Council in producing this guide).