

On the Nature of Briar...

A briar pipe begins as a Burl (or growth) on the root system of the White Heath Tree, a squat, hearty, shrub-like plant which grows primarily in the dry, arid, rocky wastelands around the Mediterranean Sea. Of all woods, the Briar Burl is unique for making pipes; its tough, porous and nearly impervious to heat. Burls for fine quality pipes can often be 50 to 100 years old when harvested for pipe making.

And Briar Pipes

Once harvested, the Briar burls are cut by skilled craftsmen using large, circular saws to remove the soft and cracked portions, leaving only close-grained, extremely hard Briar wood. This remaining Briar is then rough-cut into small blocks, called ebauchons, in sizes and shapes suitable for fashioning into standard shape pipes. Some particularly fine grained Briar is left uncut in larger pieces called plates which are used for larger freehand pipes.

When harvested, Briar contains considerable moisture, sap and resin. The ebauchons and plates are boiled in water for several hours to remove much of the sap and resin. This is followed by long periods of drying (up to 2 years) so that all traces of moisture are moved from the wood. This careful curing and aging process is of the utmost importance in bringing out the finest smoking qualities of a briar pipe. It allows the pipe to breathe, to absorb moisture and oil from the tobacco, assuring a cool, dry smoke.

Once the curing process is completed, the Briar is ready to be shaped into pipe bowls. A variety of hand and machine operations are necessary to complete this shaping process. Generally, the more handwork that goes into the carving of the pipe, the higher the price. Once the bowls are shaped, they are fitted with mouthpieces or stems (either vulcanite or Lucite), hand finished, stained, polished and waxed. The new pipe is now ready to give many years of smoking enjoyment.

How to Select a New Pipe

Due to the inconsistencies of nature and the conditions under which Briar grows, only a small percentage of the thousands of pipes produced each year will have a uniformly fine grain pattern and perfection of finish upon which a manufacturer will stamp his name. These perfect pipes, which may cost \$100 or more, are sometimes called firsts and represent the pinnacle of the pipe makers art. Serious pipe smokers and pipe collectors take great pride in owning and smoking these fine pipes.

The remaining Briar pipes may have tiny, natural surface flaws or sandpits, some of which are almost undetectable, some of which are large enough to warrant putty fills. While these tiny surface imperfections affect the aesthetic appearance of the pipe, they have absolutely no effect on the smoking qualities of the pipe. These pipes, often referred to as seconds, are sold at more reasonable prices, under numerous brand names and represent the very best values in pipe smoking. Other bowls may be selected to be sand-blasted or carved to create a rugged, pleasingly rough texture. Most pipe smokers have several of these sandblast or hand carved pipes in their collections.

Briar pipes are available in a wide variety of standard shapes, well over a hundred in fact. The choice of shape is a matter of personal preference: some pipe smokers have a single favorite shape, others have dozens of different shapes in their collections. Briar pipes are also available in unique, one of a kind Freehand pipes. These extremely beautiful pipes follow no particular shape, but are carved according to the grain and size of the Briar.

We suggest that you heft a Briar pipe when considering it. The pipe should feel comfortable in your hand. A lightweight pipe is well-aged and cured and will offer a good tasting, cool smoke. We also recommend that you choose a pipe that does not use any kind of filter or condensing system. These systems trap bitter moisture in the shank of your pipe and prevent the effective use of the pipe cleaners during the smoke.

Selecting the right pipe is an important factor in the true enjoyment of pipe smoking. Your Tinder Box tobacconist is a knowledgeable, skilled professional. He or she can answer any questions you may have about Briar pipes and assist you in selecting the Briar pipe that's just right for you.

Smoking Your Pipe?

(This is the Best Part!)

Your greatest smoking pleasure will come from learning and practicing the basic techniques employed by pipe experts. A cool, dry, flavorful smoke time after time will be your reward. Once you know the secrets of loading, lighting and tamping your pipe, you will enjoy the full richness and flavor of your tobacco. Your pipe will stay lit longer and give you full smoking satisfaction.

How to Break In Your New Pipe

Breaking in your new pipe simply means developing a thin layer of carbon or cake on the inside wall and in the heel (bottom) of the bowl. The carbon cake acts like a grate in a fireplace to improve the draft and ensure complete combustion. It also serves as a barrier between the burning tobacco and the bare wood. Many pipes are pre-carbonized to assist you in the break-in process.

There are several methods of breaking in a new pipe. Tinder Box recommends beginning with a full bowl of tobacco. The most important thing is to smoke the tobacco all the way to the bottom. Smoke slowly. Tamp and relight as often as necessary; do not be afraid of using too many matches. If your pipe gets too hot, let it rest awhile, then tamp the dead ashes and relight. You can test if the pipe is too hot by placing it against your cheek. If it is uncomfortably hot, set it aside and allow the pipe to cool.

Three Steps to Properly Loading a Pipe

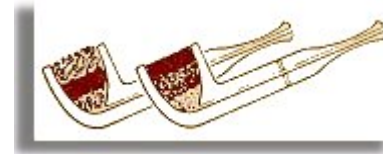
Step 1 Gravity feed tobacco into the bowl of the pipe. Gently level off the excess with the top of the bowl. Press the tobacco down gently about 2/3 from the top.



Step 2 Again, gravity feed tobacco into the bowl; gently level off the excess with the top of the pipe. Press slightly harder, this time until the tobacco is about 1/3 from the top.



Step 3 Once more gravity feed the tobacco into the pipe to overflowing. Press firmly. The tobacco should be slightly springy and level with the top of the pipe bowl.



Note: It is important to use fresh tobacco at all times; dry tobacco will crunch down and produce a hot smoke.

Lighting Your Pipe

When lighting, puff with long, slow puffs. Move the match or lighter slowly around the outside edge of the tobacco. Puff as many times as necessary to completely light the top surface of the tobacco. This is called the false or charring light. This will assure an even burning load.

Next take the pipe out of your mouth, and tamp the ashes gently; pressing them down on the unburned portion of tobacco.

Now, relight and puff rhythmically. Blow lightly into the stem between puffs as though you were inflating a tiny balloon. This balloon method feeds air to the base of the pipe just as a bellows feeds a forge.

Again smoke s-l-o-w-l-y. Do not let your new pipe get too hot. Important Note: Do not knock the ashes out of the first load of your pipe. Instead, just fluff the loose ash out gently. If there is unburned tobacco mixed in with the ashes, you are not smoking far enough down. Make sure that you have only a gray ash residue in the bottom of the pipe. You should always cake the heel first; the top will gradually cake itself after a number of smokes.