The tobacco plant is easier to grow than you might think, it will grow almost anywhere and in most soil types. There are many methods of curing tobacco to improve the flavour, yet a fine smoke can be achieved with very little fuss. This guide will teach you how to grow, harvest and cure your tobacco in the simplest way. Once you’ve got the basics right we’ll let you in on many of the secrets used to create some of the finest tobacco in the world.
What You Need To Produce Your Own Tobacco.

1. Somewhere to grow your plants. Your plants need to be planted with a minimum spacing of 2ft between plants and rows; ideally just over 1m square per plant should be used. Tobacco plants grow well in a wide variety of soil types and are not fussy about where they grow, however you will get a better crop if you use a rich soil that has plenty of organic matter dug into it. Avoiding heavy clay soil types is also a good idea; however this can be remedied by incorporating peat or other organic matter into your soil. Tobacco plants prefer full sun but will grow well in partial shade too. A full grown tobacco plant can be 7ft tall but will usually support itself as long as the area is not too windy, canes can be used if your plants seem at risk of blowing over. If you don’t have any ground to plant your plants a 12 litre pot per plant, filled with multipurpose compost will do just fine.

2. Somewhere to dry and cure your plants - a loft, shed, garage or shaded greenhouse will do the job. Of course you can get more equipment for curing, which is covered later in this guide.

How Many Plants Should I grow?

Ideally you’ll want to grow enough tobacco for over a year’s supply. This is because you will get one crop per year and tobacco improves in flavour the longer it is cured. Each mature tobacco plant will yield around 100g of dried tobacco so around 20 plants will be perfectly adequate for most smokers. If you can’t fit this many plants in simply plant them a little closer together and fit in as many as you have room for.

Caring for your tobacco plants...

Once your plants arrive in late spring/early summer, plant them straight out into your prepared bed, or if it’s still cold in your area pot them on and grow on in a bright window for a couple of weeks. You do not need to remove the mesh from around the root ball, this will rot in time. A large bottomless plastic bottle with lid removed can also be placed over each plant. This will help to get them established and protect them from cold snaps and snails. After a couple of weeks outside they should be well established and growing well. You may now start to feed with a nitrogen based fertiliser. Don’t use tomato feed as this will encourage flowers and not leaves. If you have good, fertile soil you may not need to feed at all. Always stop feeding as you see flower buds forming, this is to make sure the nitrogen level is not too high when it comes to curing - too high a nitrogen level can affect the chemical processes that need to take place. Your plants will grow side shoots, these should be taken out to allow the plants’ energy to be concentrated towards the larger leaves that you will use. When flower heads form these should also be removed. Other than this just make sure your plants don’t get too dry and you’ll have flourishing specimens in no time.

Pests

Tobacco plants are very resilient to pests, it is advised to go organic and only use warm water sprayed from a mist spray if you do see any pests – however this is very unlikely. The only pests that may be a real problem are slugs and snails; these should be removed on site. You should also make sure that there are no piles of rubbish close to your plants as these may harbour hungry pests.
When picking your leaves take your time and pick the leaves as they ripen. Around the time that flower heads start to form and the plants are fully grown the bottom leaves will start to turn yellow, this shows that they are ready to pick. This should be around 90 days after planting out. If they start yellowing before this pick them straight away.

It is best if you can pick your leaves in dry weather. The lowest leaves that have been near the soil may be too damaged or muddy to use so should be discarded or kept separate, this prevents fungal infections at a later date.

Take the leaves, cut a slit near the butt end of the centre rib of each leaf, feed a thin cane or similar through these slits so that the leaves hang down about an inch apart. Hang these sticks somewhere dry, out of the way and preferably warm. An attic, a dry shed or garage are fine for this. Keep picking the leaves over the coming few weeks until your plants have only a few leaves left. At this point the whole plant may be cut and hung in the same way.

Time for harvesting your tobacco...
What you’ll need:
1. Your harvested and dried tobacco leaves
2. A slow cooker
3. A timer plug (optional)
4. A sharp knife
5. 2 sheets of strong ply wood approximately 2ft square
6. A “C” clamp or stack of bricks (or something very heavy)
7. A mist spray bottle
8. A jar of honey (or other preferred /flavours)
9. Some glycerine (available from many baking shops or chemists)

What to do:
1. Once your plants are fully harvested, and dried take your leaves and cut out the central spine with a sharp knife or pair of scissors.
2. Mist both sides of the leaves with warm tap water, after a few minutes the leaves will become pliable allowing you to flatten them out.
3. Create a stack of leaves around 1/2 an inch thick.
4. Place your stack of leaves between 2 pieces of strong plywood.
5. You now need to compress the leaves between the wood, this can be done by placing the stack in a clamp and tightening gradually, or using very heavy weights such as a large stack of bricks.
6. After 2 days you will find that most of the excess moister has been squeezed out and you are left with a solid slab of compressed tobacco.
7. Use a sharp knife to cut the block into cubes of around 1/4" square.
8. Take your tobacco cubes and place them in your slow cooker and set to its lowest setting or around 50 degrees Celsius. Your tobacco will need to cure for around 2 weeks, being turned and stirred daily. If your tobacco starts to look dry simply mist with a little water. It will be noted that your tobacco will have an acrid smell at first (if you have an unused room or a shed with power it is best to make use of it) which will lessen as the cure progresses; this is the curing process at work. Once the end of the curing process is reached the tobacco will have a sweet smell, so we know it’s ready. To save electricity it is a good idea to use a timer plug that will allow you to automatically turn the slow cooker off for 10 minutes every 20 minutes or so. This will maintain a good curing temperature yet save 1/3rd of the power bill.
Casing Your Tobacco...

Once your tobacco is cured you'll want to store it to give it the longest life possible. To do this we have found that the best method is to use glycerine. Glycerine is a sweet tasting, colourless, low toxicity liquid that is used in baking, cosmetics, painting, and in preventing horses' hooves from drying out - amongst many other uses. It is derived from fats and oils, those obtained from vegetables would be best for our use. All of the applications of glycerine are with the aim of preventing something from drying too quickly, whether it is horses' hooves, our skin, icing or paint, and for our application it is no different.

1. Create a solution of three parts hot water, two parts honey and one part glycerine. At this stage it is possible to add a whole range of flavours to your blend.

2. Lay your tobacco out on a tray and using a paint brush apply the mixture evenly across all surfaces.

3. Leave the casing solution to dry for a few days before storing the tobacco in bags or a tin in which it can breathe a little.

Using this method your tobacco should last for years. When you are ready to smoke it, simply take a cube and slice thin strands from the block before fluffing it up ready to roll.
For email support on growing your own tobacco at home simply contact us at support@tobaccoplants.co.uk.

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