

# How to break in a pipe:

Everyone has their own opinion on how to break in a pipe and even if it should be done at all.

When you get your new pipe, it may or may not come with a coating on the inside. This coating is added by the manufacturer for several different reasons (aesthetics, better finishing of the briar, etc), but don't confuse this coating as a layer of cake. It may or may not speed up the process by which the cake is made, but even with this coating, you should still break in your pipe to prolong its life.

As I mentioned, there are many methods to breaking in a pipe. Regardless of if you break it in starting with a partial bowl or a full bowl, I find three things to be important above all when breaking in a pipe.

- Smoke slowly
- Smoke all the way to the bottom
- Don't let your pipe get too hot

**Smoking slowly** is probably the most important of all when breaking in a pipe. If you smoke a pipe too quickly it can get too hot. Burning too hot means that you run the risk of burning the briar itself rather than just the tobacco. This is one thing that can cause burnouts. Again, moisture in the bowl or the tobacco can be caused to steam and many issues will be seen down the road.

**Smoke all the way down to the bottom.** It seems the pipe-smoking community is on the fence with this one. Some people never smoke their bowl all the way to the bottom, so don't see the need for cake that far down. However, I am one of those guys who will smoke my tobacco until it's ash. If I'm smoking a whole bowl regularly, I want the entire thing to be protected. Some people suggest that having cake at the bottom of the bowl will clog up the draw hole and you'll end up having to run a drill bit through it to clear it out. I have been smoking pipes for over ten years and this has never happened to me. If you clean your pipe regularly and run a pipe cleaner through it, you should be fine.

**Don't let your pipe get too hot.** This goes along with smoking slowly but there are times when I feel I'm smoking painfully slowly and my bowl still gets too hot. One test you can use to see if your pipe is too hot is to put it against your cheek. I have pretty tough hands and at times the pipe may not seem that hot when it really is. If you set it against your cheek and it is uncomfortable, you know it's too hot. If this happens, set it down and let it rest for a while. Try it again in a few minutes and light it back up. There is nothing wrong with having to relight your pipe. Make sure you are doing this until you have smoked the entire bowl.

# Pipe Care & Maintenance

If you follow these tips to proper care and maintenance, your pipe can last many years.

- Most importantly, use pipe cleaners as you smoke. It will help keep the pipe dry and smelling sweet.
- Never leave your pipe in the sun or heat. Direct sunlight will change the color of the pipe, and the heat can change the flavor of your pipe.
- If you have to stop smoking and are not going to smoke again in the next 10 or 20 minutes, empty your pipe. Never leave tobacco, smoked or unsmoked, in your pipe. It clogs the flow of air necessary to help dry the pipe and adds moisture to an already moist pipe.
- When emptying your pipe, never bang it on anything except the palm of your hand. Use a pipe tool to loosen the tobacco and empty it carefully.
- The last thing you should do to your pipe, after you have emptied the bowl of tobacco, is run a pipe cleaner through the stem and shank. This will clean and dry out your pipe. Don't remove your bit from the shank unless doing a major cleaning.
- Rotate your pipes. Never smoke a hot pipe; try to wait at least one to two hours before re-smoking the same pipe.
- Try to keep your pipes in the open; never keep them in a closed box, drawer or bag. Pipes kept in closed containers will become smelly. Pipe racks are the best; they are open, which allows the air to flow through the pipes. Also, most racks keep the pipe in the best storage position, with the stem facing up and the bowl on the bottom.
- If the pipe becomes a little smelly and not as sweet as before, try dipping your pipe cleaners in drinking alcohol (vodka or rum). Run the alcohol dipped pipe cleaner through the stem and shank until it comes out clear; then let your pipe “rest” for a couple of weeks.
- If the outside of your pipe bits become dirty or start to turn color, try using toothpaste on a rag. Use it only on the pipe bit and not on the shank. Toothpaste is a mild abrasive; it will clean the bit without harming it.