

What is Traditional Tobacco?

A long time ago, the creator gave First Nations people the gift and knowledge of traditional tobacco. Traditional tobacco has been used in healing and cultural ceremonies for thousands of years for its powerful spiritual meaning. The use and meaning of tobacco is unique to different First Nations. Cree people call traditional tobacco *kinikinik*. It is a shrub mixture of red willow bark and green leaves.

How is Traditional Tobacco used?

Tobacco has a variety of medicinal purposes. Tobacco establishes a direct communication link between a person and the spiritual world. Traditional tobacco is used in sacred pipes which is used by pipe carriers. The most powerful way of communicating with the spirits is to use tobacco in a Sacred Pipe. The smoke from these sacred pipes carry the prayers to the creator. This practice been done for many years.

An individual can give traditional tobacco to First Nation Elders as a sign of respect when asking for guidance, protection, and direction. Traditional tobacco can be used as an offering to mother earth to collect medicines, roots, and berries. Traditional tobacco is given to mother earth when we hunt and harvest animals for food. Traditional tobacco is sometimes used directly by some Nations for healing.

The care and gift of traditional tobacco is a part of centuries of traditions that connects youth, adults and elders together.

How is Traditional Tobacco use different from commercial use?

Only First Nation elders and individuals who have knowledge of traditional tobacco can use it and pass on the knowledge to the young and old. Traditional tobacco is sacred and can only be used for cultural purposes. Traditional tobacco is not meant to be inhaled into the lungs, ie. in pipe ceremonies people take smoke into their mouth and blow it out right away. Commercial use of tobacco products like cigarettes, snuff, snus, and others are not meant to be used as traditional tobacco. Tobacco companies have taken a sacred medicine and added harmful chemicals to it that can cause addiction, disease and death.

Every community has their own tobacco story, what's yours?



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