
Growing Virginia Tobacco .

How to grow your own tobacco in the UK.



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The cost of growing in the UK (The Tax Man).

Currently a packet of 20 cigarettes in the UK will cost you at least £5, and hand rolling tobacco is not much less. No matter the health implications of smoking, the pricing of these products are a complete travesty. Production and profit in no way relate to the retail value, and although we are advised the high tax is to help with health costs I would doubt the NHS see very little of it.

As with these commercial tobacco products, the government has also taken upon itself to tax people who produce tobacco plants for their personal consumption. As I don't want to get anyone into trouble for growing the plant, I feel at least a passing word needs to be spent on how much producing your own tobacco will cost.

The following excerpt has been copied from the free smoking website. It advises that tax does need to be paid on any plants you grow, but only when it is ready to smoke.

“Duty only becomes due once the tobacco can be smoked i.e. when the cured tobacco leaves have been shredded. There is no duty on tobacco seeds, which are quite legal to buy, or on the tobacco plants themselves.”

<http://www.freesmoking.co.uk/moreinfoUK.html>

The above excerpt is from a letter to Plantation House (<http://www.coffinails.com/>) from HM Customs & Excise. If you would like to know how much tax you will have to pay, you will need to contact customs directly and advise them how much you have produced. Good luck with that. I've provided a link for their website. <http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/>



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The REAL cost of growing in the UK.

Barring any tax, the costs of growing your own tobacco should be minimal. Seeds are quite cheap, and there is now a thriving UK trade seed varieties. Tobacco plants require no special soils or additives, and grow well with a minimum of nutrient feeding (A half measure of tomato feed can be used in place of any specialist nutrients). Tobacco likes a sunny area, but I have grown plants successfully in semi-shaded areas.

I live in Manchester (North West UK), and if you can successfully grow tobacco in this region, then you can do it anywhere. I have found the plants to be quite hardy, and once they grow up a little they suffer from few illnesses, but slugs and snails can be a problem. Due to having no real back garden I grow in pots. An 8lt round pot can easily produce a plant of up to 5ft in length. I usually have a 6lt pot, and produce a plant around 4-5ft including flowers. People with gardens, allotments, or bigger pots, can expect much larger plants due to soil depth.



Chapter 2

The REAL cost of growing in the UK continued.

Basic Price List:

Needed:	Prices (Approx Only):
Seeds (of course):	£ 2.00 (Easily bought from eBay or online)
Black Pots:	£ 1.00 (I bought 6 plastic buckets from the local supermarket for £1)
Soil*:	£10.00
Misc:	£ 2.00
Total:	£15.00

*For a long time now I have been able to get 3 bags of John Innes soil for £10 from the local garden centre. I usually purchase 1 bag of no1 (for seedlings), and 2 bags of no2 (for the rest of the growing period). This is only my preference. You will be able to purchase any seedling and follow-up soil from a decent garden centre.

Although the above is a very basic pricing list, you can still see that for less than £20 you can make a start on your own tobacco stocks. Of course if you invest more, the return can be greater. But in this example we will only be dealing with a couple of plants.



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Germination.

Tobacco seeds are very small (300,000 or more per ounce), and should be sown somewhere sheltered so you do not lose them in the wind. The soil (using your John Innes No1 or other seedling soil) should be free of weed seed and disease organisms. A flower pot is fine to start if you are only growing a few plants. Sprinkle the seeds on the soil surface. (Normally a beginner will purchase seeds in packs of 100 or more. I usually only take a small of pinch of seeds from the pack, and then sow them in the starter pot.) Pat the surface lightly to insure there is good contact between the seeds and soil. Water the soil with a plant mister, or light spray. Add water as often as necessary to keep the soil surface moist, but do not over water. Temperature ranges should be around 70-80°F. Do not put any seedlings out until all chances of frost are over.



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The Seedling Stage.

Depending on the seeds and environment, it may take a couple of weeks for germination to start. You may even have to sow a few times if you are only using small numbers of seeds. When they start to grow you will need to select one, and weed out the others as soon as possible.

As the seedlings continue to grow, moisture at the soil level can be decreased. Be careful not to overwater.

The nutrients in the soil will keep your plant happy until it is transplanted into a larger pot.

NOTE: I do acknowledge that I have not added the smaller pots to the price list. This is because you can find them anywhere, from recycling supermarket fruit and vegetable containers, to small pot plants etc. There's no reason to pay for them.



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Transplanting.

Transplanting tobacco is very similar to transplanting other garden plants. As we are using pots, I like to re-pot the plant into a larger container at least once before it goes into its final 6lt. You need to give the plant enough time between re-pots to grow a good root ball, but how long this is will depend on the size of the containers you are using.

When re-potting ensure the plant goes into a container two or three times larger than the last. This will allow the plant room to grow, and the new soil will provide enough nutrients until the next time you re-pot.



Chapter **5**

Transplanting Continued.

Tobacco plants can be very temperamental at this young stage, and do not like rough handling.

When re-potting the seedling from the smaller container try not to touch the root system.

The young plants do not like water on their leaves, so ensure you damp off any water, especially on any leaves touching the soil.

Water the plants immediately after transplanting, and as needed during the season.



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Fertilizers.

Fertilizers for tobacco can be the same as used for tomato, pepper, or potato. Tobacco requires a lot of nitrogen and potash which is supplied by wood ashes.

As we are re-potting our plants twice, you should not really need to use much fertilizer until they have been in their final pots for a few weeks. I would start the feed at a lower than recommended level, and see if the plants respond in any negative way.

The best approach to fertilizing garden tobacco would be to apply fertilizer as needed to keep the plants growing well with a good green colour. However, do not over fertilize or the plants may be too big and rank. If adequately fertilized up to the time of flowering, there should be no need to add any more fertilizer after the flowers begin to form.



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Growing Pains (Pests and Disease).

Several pests can be problems for tobacco, but most of these are avoided by pot growing and purchasing decent soil (such as the Innes range).

The most common insect problems expected would be budworms, aphids and hornworms. Diseases that damage tobacco can include those that attack other plants, or they may be tobacco specific.

If you are having problems you will need to identify the pest problem / disease and consult the appropriate control guide for information. Remember, you may be chewing or smoking this plant and you do not want to be eating chemicals. There are now plenty of organic additives to help you with nay issues.

For the most part I only had problems with slugs and snails eating the leaves. You can buy copper tape in most garden centres, and tying a ring of this around the bottom of the pots sorted this issue out.



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Topping.

If you are not growing your plants for their flowers or seeds, then you will need to remove the bud to help with leaf growth. Topping, or removal of the terminal bud, allows the upper leaves to get larger and thicker than they would in an un-topped condition. The top can be removed by breaking it out or cutting it off, preferably before any flowers open. Soon after the top is removed, and before if topping is delayed, smaller buds or suckers develop at each leaf. The best way for the home gardener to prevent the suckers from reducing yield and quality is to remove them by hand. Suckers should be removed when they exceed about an inch in length. It may be necessary to remove suckers several times.

The below picture shows an un-topped plant just before flowering.



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Growing For Seeds.

The first time you grow, you may wish to grow for seeds rather than a tobacco stock. This will ensure that you do not have to purchase seeds for the next year, and



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Growing For Seeds continued.

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Harvesting and Curing.

Harvesting and curing of your tobacco leaves is probably the most difficult part, and one of the main reasons there is not more home production. Another deterrent is the need to age the cured tobacco for one to three years or longer. Each growing situation is different, so there are no hard or fast rules.

Curing tobacco is a means of removing any unpleasant smell that uncured tobacco has. You can smoke your tobacco without curing it if you don't mind the smell (not unlike herbal tobacco), but I'd advise against it.

Curing tobacco doesn't take long and vastly improves the smell.

Tobacco may be cured with heat added or it may be air cured. There does not appear to be any practical means for the gardener to use heat to cure the tobacco because of the facilities that are required. Again, some producers of home-grown tobacco have built curing facilities and may offer them for sale. Tobacco could be cured without heat if a building with good air circulation is available. Temperatures for air curing may range from 60-65°F up to 90-95°F, and the relative humidity of the air should be about 65-70 percent. Proper curing should take a few weeks in order to have good quality. Tobacco that cures too fast will be green and not have good aroma and flavour, while mould or rot may develop if curing is slow. A building that can be opened and closed as needed to control the relative humidity and drying rate is desirable. Curing procedures need to be developed for individual situations.



Chapter **10**

Harvesting and Curing continued.

You could also lay the tobacco leaves out on the grass on a hot sunny day and they will dry within hours. Depending on the temperature, the humidity and the breeze, green leaves will turn yellow or yellow/brown, and yellow leaves will turn brown. You may be lucky enough to have green leaves turn completely brown.

Harvesting could be accomplished by either removing the leaves from the stalk in the field and curing them, or by cutting the stalk off at ground level and hanging the entire stalk in the curing facility for the leaves to cure. The leaves would then be removed from the stalk after they have cured. If the leaves are removed in the field, there should be four or five harvests at intervals of 1-2 weeks, starting with the lower leaves. The first harvest would be at or soon after topping and when the leaves show a slight yellowing. If the entire stalk is cut for curing, it should be about 3-4 weeks after topping. The lower leaves would be partially deteriorated at this time. Provide adequate space between stalks to allow for satisfactory drying of the leaves.



Chapter
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Harvesting And Curing continued.



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Aging Tobacco.

All commercial tobacco is aged for a year or more before it is used. Un-aged tobacco can be harsh and has a poorer flavour. For the home gardener, the technique of aging will probably be as difficult a process as proper curing.

Aging tobacco may require as long as 5-6 years and does not occur unless temperature and moisture conditions are favourable. If the tobacco is too dry, there is no aging. If it is too moist, there will be decay of the leaves. Unfortunately the proper temperature and moisture content vary widely. The home producer would need the knowledge and skill to properly age the tobacco or be willing to experiment with the tobacco. This is the same if you wish to add flavouring agents during or after aging, and before the tobacco is used.



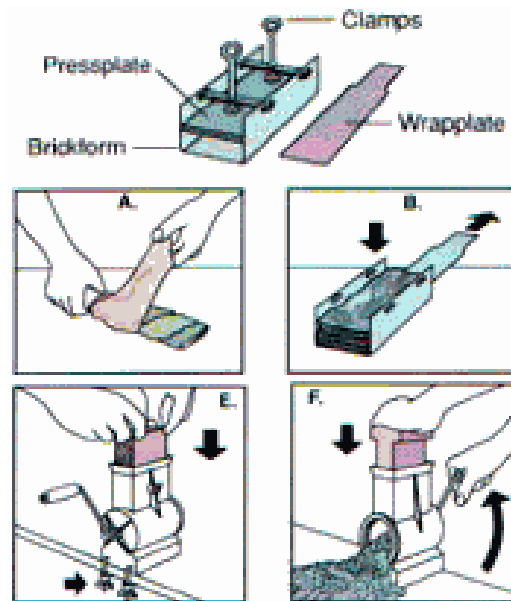
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Cutting and Shredding.

Once you have your tobacco in a dried and cured state, you will now be ready to cut and shred it to smoke. Shredding your tobacco can be a time consuming process, especially if you are growing for cigarettes which need to be shredded a lot finer than pipe tobacco.

Shredders can be bought on EBay, or from a few on-line shops (such as the item below). You can also cut your tobacco by hand, but this can take a lot longer than the mechanised version to get the correct shredding thickness.



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Points Of Reference.

A lot of the information in this text has been taken from the internet, and then expanded upon through personal experience. We have no affiliation with any of the sites, and they are in no order of preference. Some of the sites sell their own seeds, and have their own shops, but we offer no recommendations.

A condensed growing guide.

http://www.gb-online.co.uk/growing_guide/tobacco.php

Information on Tax and Tobacco Law.

<http://www.freesmoking.co.uk/moreinfoUK.html>

General Tobacco growing information.

<http://www.growtobacco.net/>

Forum with growing and general information.

<http://www.howtogrowtobacco.com/>