

## BORDER CROSSINGS

# ORIGINS

## BOTANY BAY LEARNING RESOURCES

### Tobacco



A tobacco plant and a man smoking -  
coloured reproduction of Lobel's  
*Plantarum seu stirpium Historia* (1570).

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tobacco\\_and\\_smoking\\_indian.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tobacco_and_smoking_indian.jpg)



First known image of a European man  
smoking, from Chute's pamphlet  
"Tabaco", 1595

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3c/Chute\\_tobacco.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3c/Chute_tobacco.JPG)

#### What do Indigenous people call this plant?

The origin of the name tobacco is not known. Some people think the name comes from Taíno, an Arawak language. In Taíno, it was said to mean either a roll of tobacco leaves (according to Bartolomé de las Casas, 1552), or from the word "tabago", which referred to a kind of L-shaped pipe used for sniffing tobacco smoke (according to Oviedo), with the leaves themselves being referred to as "cohiba".

#### When was this plant first documented?

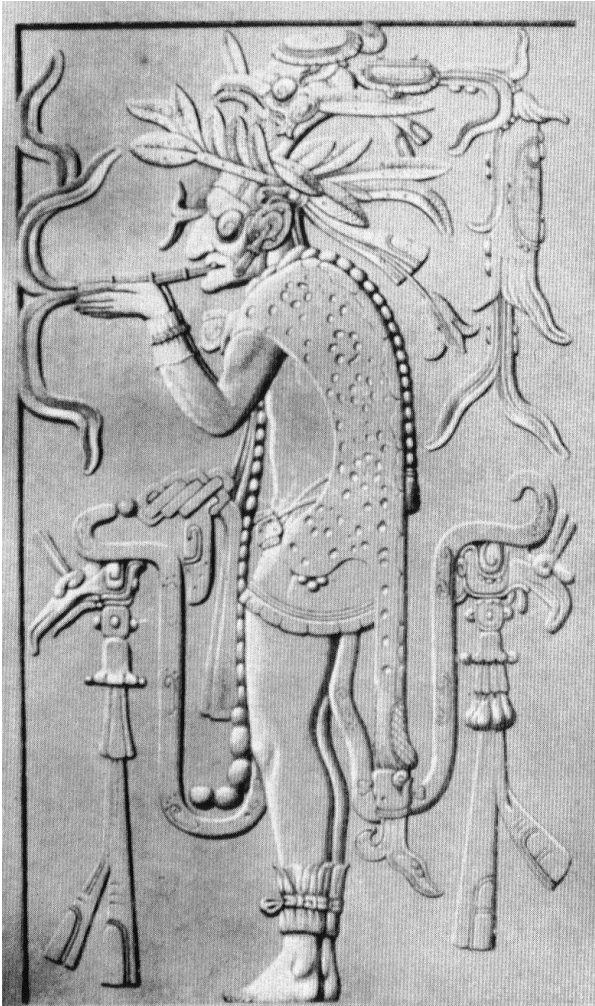
On October 15th 1492, Christopher Columbus was offered dried tobacco leaves as a gift from the Indigenous people that he encountered. Unfortunately, Columbus and his crew didn't know what the leaves were or what they were for and threw them overboard.

#### How many varieties of this plant are known?

There are more than 70 different species of tobacco.

### Where and how was the plant originally grown and used?

According to archaeological finds, it is now believed that tobacco was used by people in the Americas around 8000 years ago. It is believed that tobacco has been cultivated in the Americas since around 1BC, around the same time that maize cultivation began.



Reproduction of a Maya priest smoking from the Temple at Palenque, Mexico.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God\\_L#/media/File:Mayan\\_priest\\_smoking.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/God_L#/media/File:Mayan_priest_smoking.jpg)

### Special properties

There is a spiritual element to tobacco use as smoking tobacco is seen as a way to communicate with the spirit world - it can be smoked in ceremonies, and is often given as a gift when consulting elders for advice.

### Fun facts

Botanically, tobacco is in the Solanaceae family, which means it is related to both the potato and tomato.

### How do Indigenous people relate to this plant?

Tobacco is used in many different ways by the Indigenous people in the Americas. It is used in religious ceremonies and in medical practices including as a cure for earache or toothache, to treat colds, as a painkiller and to dress wounds (as a poultice). Smoke is used to ward off evil, to clear homes of evil spirits, as a blessing and to protect soldiers about to go into battle. Tobacco smoke can be blown into the room of a sick person to ward off evil spirits affecting them. Tobacco is also smoked as an appetite suppressant and is thought to give energy and strength to the user.

### When and how did this plant first come to Britain?

27th July 1586 is usually the date given for the arrival of tobacco in the UK when Walter Raleigh brought it to England from Virginia. However, tobacco had been widely smoked by Spanish and Portuguese sailors for many years and had probably been adopted by British sailors before 1586.

Rodrigo de Jerez and Luis de Torres were the first Europeans to observe smoking.

Nicholas Mondares, a Spanish doctor, wrote a book about the medicinal plants of the New World. He claimed that tobacco could cure 36 different illnesses including falling fingernails, worms, halitosis and lockjaw. Many Europeans believed that tobacco was useful for treating a broad range of medical problems including bad breath and cancer.

Tobacco has been used instead of money as it was so highly valued. Colonists in North America in the 1620s traded with Indigenous people in this manner.

Resources edited by Phil Hindmarsh. Project Manager Marine Begault.

BOTANY BAY is a participation and learning project by Border Crossings' ORIGINS Festival, made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to engage five schools across the country with the Indigenous heritage of plants, gardens and food.



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