



Sacred Tobacco Community Toolkit

Supporting Communities in the Revitalization of Sacred Tobacco

KeepTobaccoSacred.ca

Vision

Empowered and healthy Indigenous communities, connected through culture and through emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Mission

To support cultural connectedness and healing through Sacred Tobacco, to improve health outcomes in Indigenous communities.

Project Purpose

Empowering Elders and Knowledge Keepers to engage and support Indigenous youth in commercial tobacco use and nicotine vaping prevention, through the revitalization of Sacred Tobacco cultural knowledge, community capacity building and community-driven setting change.

This toolkit has grown out of conversations and sharing circles over the past 5 years. Our goal was to listen and gather stories and lessons from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and young people to support the revitalization of tobacco as a Sacred plant. KTSC represents these moments and is committed to carrying this message forward.

At the heart of this work, we are supporting youth in connecting to tobacco in a good way. We are preventing the harms from commercial tobacco use and nicotine vaping, and bringing traditional tobacco teachings to our young people – our future.

We are grateful to all of those who shared their time and wisdom with us, across all three Treaty areas. This project represents a promise made to share traditional teachings and wisdom, passed down from our ancestors.

With deep respect,

Treffrey Deerfoot and Gail Maiangowi
Knowledge Keepers and Beaver Bundle Holders

What is the Keep Tobacco Sacred Collaboration (KTSC)?

In 2019, the KTSC was formed to support First Nations youth in staying free from the harms of commercial tobacco and nicotine vaping addiction.

Between 2019 and 2023, KTSC had the honour of meeting with more than 200 Elders, Knowledge Keepers, young people, and community members. These meetings spanned Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 and balanced distinct First Nations cultures and regions.

Through conversations, our project on Sacred Tobacco came into focus. We talked about how Sacred Tobacco connects youth with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. We explored how sacred teachings build strength, resilience, and health.

Over the past several years, our learnings have come into focus. This knowledge belongs to the communities who have so generously shared with us. We are so grateful for your part in this journey.

This toolkit is intended to support the revitalization of tobacco as a sacred plant in communities across Alberta. We offer this guidance alongside teachings by local Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

This toolkit is made up of three sections:

1. Traditional Tobacco
2. Sharing Our Learnings
3. Support to Quit Commercial Tobacco



I would like to see if we can have our own greenhouse for the community and everybody can pitch in and work together – for the youth.

Edna Willier



Traditional Tobacco

At the heart of our work is tobacco.

Traditional tobacco is a sacred plant and a gift given by the Creator to First Nations. It is important to honour the role tobacco plays in many Indigenous cultures. Commercial tobacco is different than traditional tobacco. It is a product of colonization. Commercial tobacco contains added chemicals that make it addictive and harmful. Over time, commercial tobacco has become a dangerous drug of abuse.

We have heard how important it is for people to have access to traditional tobacco – tobacco grown in a good way, with protocol and ceremony. As part of this project, we had the honour of participating in a Beaver Bundle ceremony, where seeds were planted, cared for, and harvested.

These plants have been dried and new seeds will be planted, with the intention of sharing with Nations who would like them. From this harvest, tobacco ties have been gathered to support communities and as part of protocol.

We would be honoured to bring seedlings to communities who are looking for ways to share this knowledge with others. We wish to support the decolonization of tobacco by supporting communities to revitalize traditional tobacco teachings and restore access to traditional tobacco. By working together in this way, we can:

- Help to make commercial tobacco use less accepted
- Encourage youth who don't use commercial tobacco to avoid it
- Support people who use commercial tobacco to get help to quit

Tobacco grown as part of KTSC is not for sale. We ask that you use our tobacco only to support ceremonies and traditions in your community.

We teach our kids at school for protocol you have to have tobacco. I know that tobacco is very, very sacred and should not be abused.

Gordon Courtorielle





In my heart, the tobacco, once it's lit, the smoke is going to take my message to the Creator for whatever my vows are.

Genevieve Bruised Head

Tobacco – The Creation Story as Shared by Beaver Bundle Holders

Tobacco has been with us from the beginning. It was one of the first gifts given by Creator.

In the beginning the land formed on the back of a turtle, where animals swam in an endless ocean. Animals gathered on the turtle's back. The beaver and otter would go deep into the water and gather clay. Water birds would fetch seeds. The seeds bore fruit and vegetation grew. The animals began to fight over the food, so Creator made the First Man and First Woman using sinew, clay, bison bones and bison blood. The Creator breathed life into them and the First Man and First Woman were the caretakers of the animals.

The water birds dove down once more and came up with berries, sage, sweetgrass, cedar, and tobacco. Tobacco has a special connection to the spirit world. It can be used to heal, to carry our prayers, or as an offering to Mother Earth. Tobacco is offered to Elders in exchange for knowledge or guidance. It represents a sacred promise.

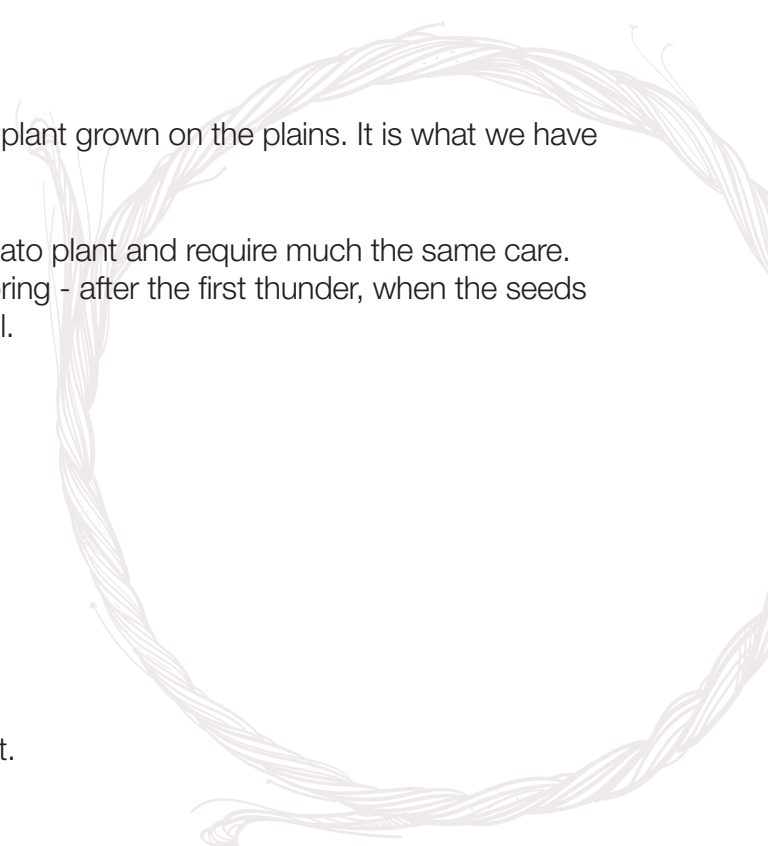
How to Grow Tobacco

Nicotina rustica is the name of the traditional tobacco plant grown on the plains. It is what we have planted through this work.

Tobacco seeds are part of the same family as the tomato plant and require much the same care. The typical growing cycle starts with planting in the spring - after the first thunder, when the seeds are not at risk of frost. It ends with harvesting in the fall.

Tobacco seeds and seedlings need five things:

1. Lots of water
2. Plenty of sunshine
3. Protection from wind and frost
4. Lots of nutrients in the soil, such as compost
5. Space to grow:
 - Plant seeds 12 inches (30 centimeters) apart.
 - Plant seedlings 24 inches (60 centimeters) apart.



How to start tobacco seeds indoors:

If you live in a climate with a shorter growing season, you can start tobacco seeds indoors and move them outside later. Be sure to plant seeds at least 4-6 weeks before moving them outdoors. Here are some helpful tips:

- Find a pot with holes on the bottom.
- Fill the pot with a soil mix that has nutrients to support seed growth (like compost).
- Sprinkle tobacco seeds on the surface of the soil. Try not to spread them too thick – tobacco seeds are very small (not much bigger than a pin prick). Leave space between them to avoid overcrowding. Don't cover the seeds with more soil – they need light to germinate.
- Keep the seeds warm and give them plenty of light.
- Water the soil often to keep it moist (but not soggy). Try to be gentle with watering! The force of the water can uproot emerging tobacco seedlings.
- When you are ready to move your tobacco seedlings outdoors:
 - Find an outdoor area with lots of sunlight, nutrients, and good drainage.
 - Carefully remove the seedlings from the pot and shake off the excess soil.
 - Space seedlings about 12 inches (30 centimeters) apart.
 - Water your plants often, especially when the ground is dry.
 - Keep the growing area free of weeds.

My hope is to educate our young people about how sacred our tobacco is. We have to educate them that the tobacco is sacred in our culture. We use it in pipe ceremony, where we smoke it. We use it in different ceremonies, we put tobacco down for whatever we are picking. When I go to the river, I put tobacco in the water because water is life for us too. We live through water. I put tobacco on everything that I pick.

Susan Quinney



Tips for planting tobacco seeds outdoors:

If there is no risk of frost, you can plant tobacco seeds outside, on the surface of the soil.

Try these tips:

- Find an outdoor space with lots of sunlight and nutrient-rich soil that drains well.
- Use a stick or finger to make shallow holes on the surface of the soil. Leave about 12 inches (30 centimeters) between each shallow hole.
- Sow your seeds around each hole, directly on the surface of the soil. Don't cover them with more soil – they need light to germinate.
- Water the seeds lightly.
- As your seedlings grow, try to keep them apart. If they cluster together, dig them up with a spoon and move them so there is distance between the seedlings.



Tips for harvesting tobacco:

As the tobacco plant grows, it will make flowers. Pick the flowers off the plant – they compete for sunlight and make it harder for leaves to grow. (You can let one plant keep its flowers so it will produce seed pods for next year).

Tobacco is ready to harvest when the leaves closest to the ground begin to turn colour. This will happen about 3-4 weeks after you remove the flowers.

When you harvest your tobacco plant:

- Grab the stock of the plant (close to the ground) and pull the entire plant out of the soil.
- Shake off the excess soil from the roots.
- Hang your plant in well-ventilated and hot area.
- Once the leaves have dried, remove them from the stalk.
- Store the leaves in any large box or container.



While these guidelines are likely to produce a good crop, it is important to honour protocol and ceremony. Connecting with local Elders, who hold these teachings, is an important part of growing tobacco in your community.

If you do not have access to an Elder, please visit KeepTobaccoSacred.ca and send us a message – we are happy to support you in this important journey.



Sharing Our Learnings

An important part of our project is the creation of a website: KeepTobaccoSacred.ca.

This virtual gathering space is where you can find:

- Videos and Elder stories
- Information on the difference between commercial and traditional tobacco
- Events and activities
- Resources to support people who want to quit using commercial tobacco or nicotine vaping products.

The website is also home to our social media campaigns, with messages of hope for Indigenous youth. Our campaigns are led by our Tobacco Warriors, a powerful group of young adults from across the province who are dedicated to being a voice for kids to look up to. They are carrying our messages about Sacred Tobacco through social media and at in-person cultural events.

You can use this website to gather information to share at community events, find teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, access resources and stay connected as this work unfolds. Everything we create through your guidance will be found here.



We are descendants of our strongest ancestors. In other words, all of us sitting here, in our DNA and in our blood, there's a reason we're still here, because we are descendants of those strongest people that walked away from all of the hardships that our people have endured...when you tell our young people that, it puts a different perspective on the way they think.

Travis Plaited Hair



Support to Quit Commercial Tobacco

For many people, quitting commercial tobacco is very hard.

Tobacco naturally contains a powerful drug called nicotine, which acts as a natural pesticide in the leaves of the plant. When cigarettes are made, more nicotine and many harmful chemicals are added (such as arsenic, ammonia, formaldehyde, and hydrogen cyanide). There are over 7,000 chemicals found in cigarette smoke.

Cigarettes are designed to create addiction. Over time, the chemicals that have been added cause damage in the body. Smoking commercial tobacco products is the leading cause of preventable death and disease around the world.

Many programs designed to help people quit do not understand the important role tobacco plays in many Indigenous cultures. It is important for KTSC that resources are available that honour this relationship, while acknowledging the harm caused by the production of commercial tobacco products.

KTSC is pleased to offer the IT'S TIME toolkit to people and communities on a quit journey. This resource supports culturally safe approaches to commercial tobacco cessation. It is designed for use by helpers (like healthcare providers and community wellness workers).

To download the IT'S TIME toolkit, go to: [**KeepTobaccoSacred.ca/resources.html**](https://KeepTobaccoSacred.ca/resources.html).

These materials can be freely copied, shared, and adapted, in accordance with the principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP). Please feel free to supplement the toolkit with your own materials.

**The development of the It's Time toolkit is informed by both evidence-based practice (Western knowledge) and wise-based practice (Indigenous Ways of Knowing). It supports commercial tobacco reduction or cessation through a strengths-based and wholistic approach.*

Seven Grandfather Teachings

Healing from the impacts of tobacco use is one of the most important things you can do for your health and the health of your family. Think about the values below, based on the Seven Grandfather Teachings, as you make changes towards your healthy future.

Honesty

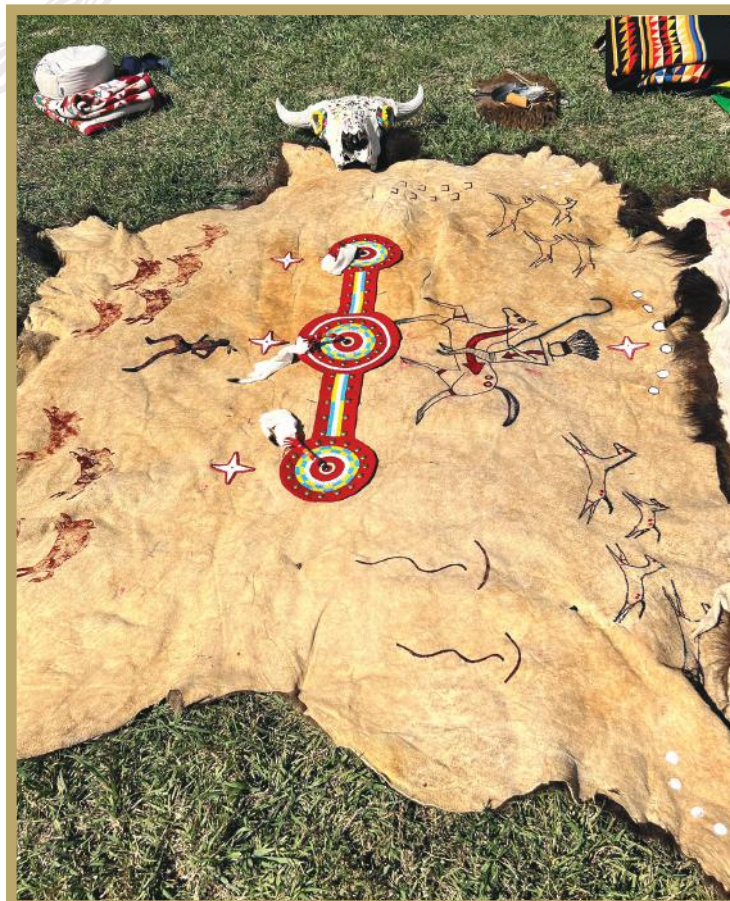
Be honest about using commercial tobacco. When you smoke, vape, or use spit tobacco, you are putting your health and the health of your family at risk.

Respect

The misuse of tobacco is not respecting the sacred place of tobacco in your culture. Giving prayer and thanks is honoring tobacco.

Humility

If you smoke tobacco, vape, or use spit tobacco, you are putting your needs ahead of your family. If you smoke, your family is being exposed to second- and third-hand smoke. Your family and friends want you to live a long and healthy life.



Wisdom

If you would like to quit using commercial tobacco, think about the strengths you have to make a change. You don't have to quit alone—reach out to others for help and support.

Truth

Sharing the truth about using traditional tobacco and commercial tobacco with others can make a big difference in your community.

Love

Quitting smoking, vaping, or spit tobacco is good for your health. Love yourself by making that change.

Bravery

Quitting smoking, vaping, or spit tobacco can be hard, but you can do it.

Moving Forward

At the heart of this work is the understanding that communities are unique and are rich with strength, hope, and resilience. KTSC wants to support Elders, Knowledge Keepers, youth, and community partners in restoring tobacco as a sacred plant.

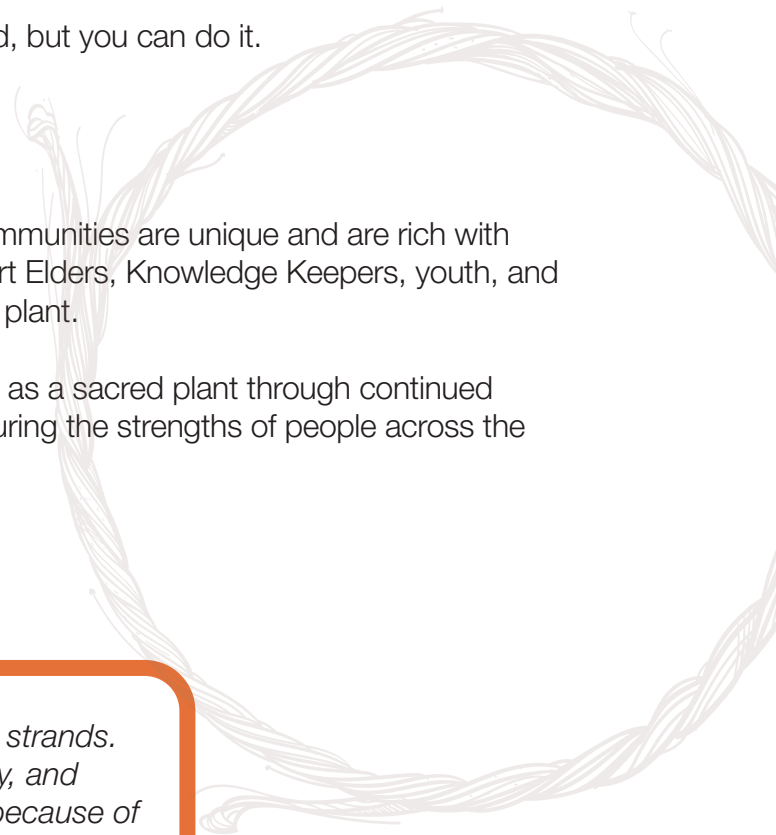
Our mission is to support the revitalization of tobacco as a sacred plant through continued community engagement. We are committed to honouring the strengths of people across the province and elevating the voices we hear.

Ekosani – Nitsiyyi'taki – Thank you



Let's take the sweet grass, there's three strands. Each one of them represents mind, body, and spirit. When they smoke that cigarette, because of all those toxics, they all go separate. We get lost.

Gordon Gladue





KTSC