

## Traditional Medicines used as Tobacco Offerings at Stanton Territorial Hospital

The following plants are used in the mixture:

### **Wild Mint (*Mentha arvensis*)**



The wild mint appears in late June and lasts throughout the summer. The plant has tapered leaves and small flowers, purple to white in colour, that cluster on the stem. It grows in moist places.

**Harvesting:** Mint is best harvested in July and August, before the heat of the day. Harvest the leaves and leave the root in ground; do not dry in sun. Mint is high in aromatic oils and when stored properly in a cool, dry place it keeps its strong smell and flavor.

### **Bearberry**

An evergreen shrub with small leather-like leaves that form large mats on the ground. The berries are red and mealy inside.

**Harvesting:** Can be harvested all summer. Pick leaves and berries, leaving roots in the ground. Dry in a bundle in a dry, cool place.



### **Red Willow**

Commonly called "red willow" in the North, this shrub is actually a species of alder. The bark is reddish to grayish brown. The roots of the red willow like a moist environment, so the shrub is often found on lakeshores and river banks.

**Harvesting:** The red willow is best harvested in the spring when the bark is easier to remove. Peel bark away from the stem of the plant and dry it for later use.

### **Organic Tobacco**

Organic tobacco (grown without chemicals) has long been used by Aboriginal peoples in offerings, ceremonies and when praying to the Creator.

**Harvesting:** Although the tobacco plant does not grow in the NWT it was historically traded among the tribes and mixed with local medicinal plants. Nowadays, it can be purchased dried and ready to use from First Nations suppliers.



Dene Drummers in Fort Simpson,  
National Aboriginal Day 2011 - GNWT

# Tobacco's Two Uses

Traditional Use vs Commercial Abuse

## Know the Difference!



STANTON ELDERS' COUNCIL



Tobacco used in a traditional and respectful way does not poison and harm people the way commercial tobacco does. Instead, it has the ability to heal.

## Traditional Tobacco

Traditional, Ceremonial or Sacred Tobacco is a gift that was given to Aboriginal people by the Creator. It has a special place in many aboriginal communities. Sometimes the tobacco plant is used alone and at other times it is combined with other healing plants from the land. When tobacco is used in a sacred way a person is exposed to very little smoke.

There are many ceremonial uses for tobacco such as in a pipe, offerings, and prayers. Some examples are:

- Smoke from tobacco burned on sacred fires or in a pipe rises to the sky, carrying prayers to the Creator.
- Tobacco is left as an offering to Mother Earth when traditional medicines are picked.
- Tobacco is given as a gift when an Elder is asked for guidance.
- Tobacco is left on the land by a traveler in thanks for a safe journey.

## Commercial Tobacco

Today, most commercial tobacco is used like a drug. It is highly addictive and contains many chemicals that are known to cause cancer and harm the body in other ways.

A smoker, or user of chew takes these harmful chemicals into their lungs and body many times every day. Constant use of tobacco in this way causes damage over time.

The widespread use of commercial tobacco results in huge profits for big business, but only loss and suffering for Aboriginal communities and families.

Deadly Facts:

- Commercial Tobacco use kills four times more people than motor vehicle accidents, suicide, homicide and AIDS *combined*.
- Smoking rates in the NWT are more than double the Canadian rate and Aboriginal people are much more likely to be smokers.

