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TOBACCO PROCESSING

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This invention relates generally to tobacco and more particularly to an improved process for treating the same.

It is known to cure tobacco by exposing it to air currents or by exposing it to the rays of the sun. Since tobacco is an organic substance it is subject to decay—that is, it is capable of nurturing the growth of bacteria and viruses.

It is therefore among the objects of the present invention to provide a novel and useful process by means of which the curing of tobacco is greatly improved and its quality is preserved. Thus, in accordance with the present method, not only is the growth and support of viruses prevented, but the flavor and aroma of the tobacco, and of the smoke therefrom, is increased to a high degree.

Another object of the present invention is to subject the tobacco being treated to a curing and preserving step consisting of a current of smoke.

These objects and other incidental ends and advantages will more fully appear in the progress of this disclosure and be pointed out in the appended claims.

In accordance with the invention, an elongated smoking oven is provided wherein there is a fire pot at one end thereof and charring chamber at the other end. A smoke pipe is connected to the charring chamber at the outer end thereof. A treatment chamber is provided within which the tobacco is located, the leaf tobacco being dispersed, hung or spread, so that it offers a maximum of surface exposure to the smoke. The outer end of the smoke pipe is connected to said treatment chamber.

In practicing the present method, the tobacco is first subjected to any of the curing methods well-known in the art, and not herein described in detail. After the first curing, just described, the tobacco is aged. This aging step is also well-known in the art, and for that reason is not described in detail.

After the two foregoing curing and aging standard steps, the tobacco is placed in the treatment chamber. Just before, it is in the treatment chamber, the tobacco is exposed to water spray or a current of highly humidified air. This dampens the tobacco and prevents it from being dried out or overdried by the exposure thereof to smoke.

Next the charring chamber is charged with a suitable quantity of a charrable substance such as wood and/or charcoal. This wood or charcoal is preferably of a type used in producing a curing smoke similar to that used in smoke-curing or preserving fish, meat and other food products. Examples of this are hickory, maple, tobacco plant stalks, and charcoal and other aromatic woods.

Added to the wood or charcoal in the charring chamber are other constituents used to increase the taste and/or the aroma of the product and/or the smoke produced, when the tobacco which has been treated by my method is subsequently burned for its own smoke.

Examples of such constituents are sugar; maple sugar; coffee; essences known to be used as tobacco flavors which are a combination of fruit flavors; aromatic wine flavors; spices or flavors such as vanilla, cherry, charcoal, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, licorice, jasmine and/or nutmeg.

Following the application of the constituents to the charrable substances in charring chamber, fuel is placed in the firebox and it is ignited. The hot combustion gases pass through the charring chamber where they raise the temperature of the said constituents and charrable substances to a temperature sufficient for them to give off smoke containing the volatilized materials released by the

charrable substances and constituents in the charring chamber but below the flame temperature. This smoke, which is a relatively low-temperature smoke, is conducted by the smoke pipe to the treatment chamber where it impinges upon the various exposed surfaces of the tobacco therein.

The length of time that the tobacco is exposed to the smoke in the treatment chamber will depend upon the intensity or concentration of the smoke, its temperature and velocity of movement before the smoke passes out from the treatment chamber through a suitable exit chimney. The higher the intensity and temperature, and the slower the velocity, the greater will be the curing accomplished. The length of time of the smoke treatment is also dependent upon the amount of curing, flavor, and aroma desired in the finished cured tobacco. This, in turn, is dependent upon the final use of the tobacco. Filtered cigarettes will require tobacco which has greater aroma and flavor, while tobacco intended for consumption in smoking pipes and cigars will require tobacco with a lesser aroma and flavor.

In any event, however, the tobacco is exposed to a sufficient concentration of smoke for a sufficient time to adequately cure the same, so that spoilage and decay due to bacterial or viral growth is prevented.

If, as a result of the treatment and the smoke-curing and preserving step, the moisture content of the tobacco has been excessively reduced, the proper balance may be restored by spraying, steaming, or exposing the tobacco to highly humidified air.

When a given quality of tobacco is so absorbent that the quantity of smoke exposure sufficient to accomplish full curing and preserving produces too strong a smoke taste or aroma, then I subject the tobacco to a current of clean air which reduces the taste and aroma to the desired level.

I wish it to be understood that I do not desire to be limited to the exact details described, for obvious modifications will occur to a person skilled in the art to which the present invention relates.

I claim:

1. The method of treating and preserving tobacco, comprising: taking cured and aged leaf tobacco; producing smoke by heating a charrable substance by a separate heat source to a temperature below the flame temperature but sufficient to cause smoke; and conducting the produced smoke into contact with said tobacco.

2. The method of claim **1** in which a flavoring constituent is added to the charrable substance.

3. The method of claim **1** in which an aroma constituent is added to the charrable substance.

4. The method of claim **1** in which a flavoring constituent and an aroma constituent are added to the charrable substance.

5. The method of claim **1** in which moisture is added to the tobacco.

6. The method of claim **5** in which the moisture is added before the exposure to smoke.

7. The method of claim **5** in which the moisture is added before the exposure to smoke.

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