

THE DRUG SCENE

By Mike McCulley

Fourth of a Series

Are You Going to Pot?

What is marijuana? How do you smoke it? Why smoke it? Where does it come from? What does it do to the body?

These and other questions about marijuana or pot remain unanswered for many persons. Many of the curious are potential users of marijuana or at least suffer from exposure to the decision of whether to "turn on" with marijuana. The facts on marijuana are simple enough to find and learn. But, a search for studies on marijuana's effects on many will leave the knowledge-seeker bewildered and confused.

HISTORY OF MARIJUANA

Marijuana has been widely known in various countries for hundreds of years. It has been grown and used in conjunction with semi-religious rites in numerous lands up until today.

Mexico is a source of much American marijuana, although the trend lately is towards locally grown pot.

Marijuana is diversely called pot, grass, hemp, Indian hemp, loco-weed, Mary Jane, MJ, weed, and various other terms.

For years marijuana was used commercially to make rope and a coarse cloth similar to burlap. Its tall stalks and stems were especially well-suited for this use. Also, the plant's seeds were added to bird seed compounds for bird food and the oil of the seeds was found in many paint products.

DESCRIPTION OF POT

The botanical name for the plant is "cannabis sativa." Though all parts of the plant may contain traces of the drug, the drug is obtained from the resin contained in the flowering tops and the leaves of the plant.

The flowers are composed of irregular clusters of seeds, light yellowish-green in color. The leaves are composed of an uneven number (usually from 5 to 11) of leaflets or lobes. These lobes are from 2" to 6" long, pointed about equally at both ends, with saw-like edges and pronounced ridges running from center diagonally to the edges.

The leaf is a deep green color on the upper side and lighter green on the lower; this coloring will fade with age and heat to a brown-tone hue.

The seeds are egg-shaped with circling

ridges and motley lacy markings on the surface. They will be a greenish shade when fresh, but later turn brown-like with heat.

The plant itself is a tall annual (grows fully each year) reaching a height of four to twenty feet when mature.

Marijuana will grow most anywhere, but warmer climates in particular may produce fine plants in as little as three months. The maturation will depend normally upon soil conditions, climate, and watering.

PREPARATION AND USE OF POT

The leaves are usually stripped off the stalk for air drying; if the users are in a hurry, the leaves can be dried in an oven or under a heat lamp.

The dried leaves are then shredded by hand or rubbed through a screen. This is known as "manicuring," and the stalks and seeds are removed at this time.

The shredded leaves are then rolled into double-thick cigarette papers and the ends tucked in with a match or hair pin. The two cigarette papers keep the sharp fragments from cutting through the home-made "joint" or "reefer". The tucked-in ends keep the contents from shifting out.

To smoke marijuana, one end is lit and the other end is "uncapped". Then, the smoke is drawn deeply into the lungs and held as long as possible for the maximum effect.

The experience has been described as standing close to the top of a roaring fire and breathing in the hot air of the burning material. It stings harshly and has a bitter, coarse taste.

Marijuana can also be smoked in a normal pipe much like regular tobacco, except for the method of smoking.

The noticeable odor of pot is something like alfalfa and closely resembles ordinary dried tree leaves. It has been compared with the smell of buring clay.

THE MARIJUANA USER

Because of the unpredictable effect of marijuana on a person, there is no single pattern of use symptoms. However, the following are those which are most generally present: dilated pupils with slow or no reaction to light, blood-shot eyes, rapid speech, dryness of mouth

(lack of saliva), lack of inhibitions (false bravery), distorted space and time perception (careful and studied movements); and if taken in large quantities, drowsiness and lethargy occur.

Any single symptom is not conclusive evidence of marijuana use because other drugs or narcotics may produce the same effect. When not under marijuana's influence, the user shows no immediately identifiable symptoms.

The user may experience muscular incoordination, increased heartbeat, ringing in the ears, intense feeling of heat and dizziness, cold hands and feet, a loss of coordination of the senses of sight, hearing, and balance, and loss of desire to do anything.

Physically, marijuana is not addictive; however, recent studies have shown subtle evidence of psychological dependency. It is too early to state any expert conclusions until more definitive and exploratory research is completed.

The pot user will resemble a happy drunk by acting silly, giggling, and seemingly behaving ridiculously carefree to an onlooker. Pot's effect on the central nervous system is enhanced by a joint use of alcohol. A combination of pot and alcohol has been found to cause a feeling of physical power and produce a delirious rage with violent properties.

While smoking, the user, known as a "weedhead" or "pothead", will talk a lot and will use a peculiar language of his own. He may laugh at any simple statement, be unable to account for the passage of an hour, and wear dark glasses to hide his eyes from the painful light.

An odor of marijuana may be detected on the breath of the user but often wine or beer will be an effective disguise.

SHOULD POT BE LEGAL?

Pot users number in the millions in the United States, and the use of the home-grown variety of pot seems to be increasing. The arguments for and against legalizing marijuana have reached a stalemate. Both sides want competent, extensive medical research on marijuana, and each is confident the results will make their case for them.

Marijuana use, possession, and sale is prohibited by a multitude of Federal laws, and local laws supplement the laws even further. The punishments for

violations are called overly severe by proponents of legalizing pot while the opposite camp calls for stricter penalties than those now on the books.

The "bust" (arrest) this past week in Charlotte of a group of persons for drug violations shows an important aspect of marijuana use. The drug is used extensively by the young--only one suspect arrested in the raids was over thirty.

Alcohol or pot? Some say to prohibit marijuana sale while regulating the sale of liquor is a denial of the Constitutional protection of equal right under the laws. Others contend that pot smoking is no more harmful--in fact, less harmful--than the consumption of whiskey or tobacco. And, others will argue that only marginally adjusted social misfits turn to drugs to avoid confronting problems. They say the user of alcohol is a well-adjusted, productively employed person who uses alcohol for relaxation and as an incidence of other social activities.

Some will propose that the above statements could be reversed and be true. Whatever the outcome, marijuana is a drug on the scene today. It is probably used more often than any other drug.

The legal and social questions about marijuana will find answers in the future only when more pertinent and unbiased reports of medical studies are undertaken.

We'll just have to wait and see.
Next Week: LSD

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