Bassoon Reed Care 101

Reeds are made up of an organic material, somewhere between a stick of celery and a bamboo stalk. This means that over a period of about 2 weeks to a month, the fibers begin to break down from the vibrations and saliva. This coupled with a moist environment can invite mildew or mold onto the surface of the reed. While it is impossible to completely stop this breakdown of fibers, there are a few care tips we bassoonists use to ensure our reeds last as long as possible and keep at bay any unwelcome bacteria.

Using a reed:

* If you have eaten prior to playing for the day, brush your teeth.
* Always soak in fresh room temperature water 2-4 minutes before playing the reed. If you keep a small cup in your bassoon case for reed soaking, always empty and dry it fully between practice/playing sessions and fill with fresh water each day.
* If possible, rotate between 2-3 reeds to allow proper time to dry out and rest in the case. This will help with longevity by not “blowing out” a reed too quickly by playing on only one reed. This will also always keep you prepared to play and rotate in new reeds as the older ones begin to age.
* Try to keep the reed damp while playing, dipping in water on your music stand as needed. This is especially true in the winter when the heaters are on!
* Once the playing session is over, blow air backwards through the end of the reed to remove excess moisture and wipe away with a cloth.

Storing a reed:

* If your reed came in a plastic tube with cotton inside, DO NOT store your reeds in here. This is merely a form of protection for transportation of reeds purchased from a seller. This enclosed tube has no ventilation and will expedite mold growth.
* Use a ventilated reed case with holes for airflow. Keeping the case open for 10-20 minutes after a playing session is a good option to fully dry out reeds between playing sessions.
* Check over reeds and case regularly for any black spots, fuzzy white fibers, or a sour smell as this indicates bacteria and mold have found a place inside your case. If this occurs you MUST bleach the case and toss the reeds\*. This will be rare or nonexistent if the precautions above are taken.
* Reeds will not last forever, once the fibers break down beyond playing capabilities, the reed will play very flat and certain notes will sound very wrong. If this occurs, it is time for a new reed.

\*Cleaning a case with mold:

* In the unfortunate event this occurs, you can try to bleach the case and dry it in direct sunlight but often the best and only solution is to toss the reeds and case to start fresh. This should not occur if the reeds are stored properly in a ventilated case and dry out between playing sessions.