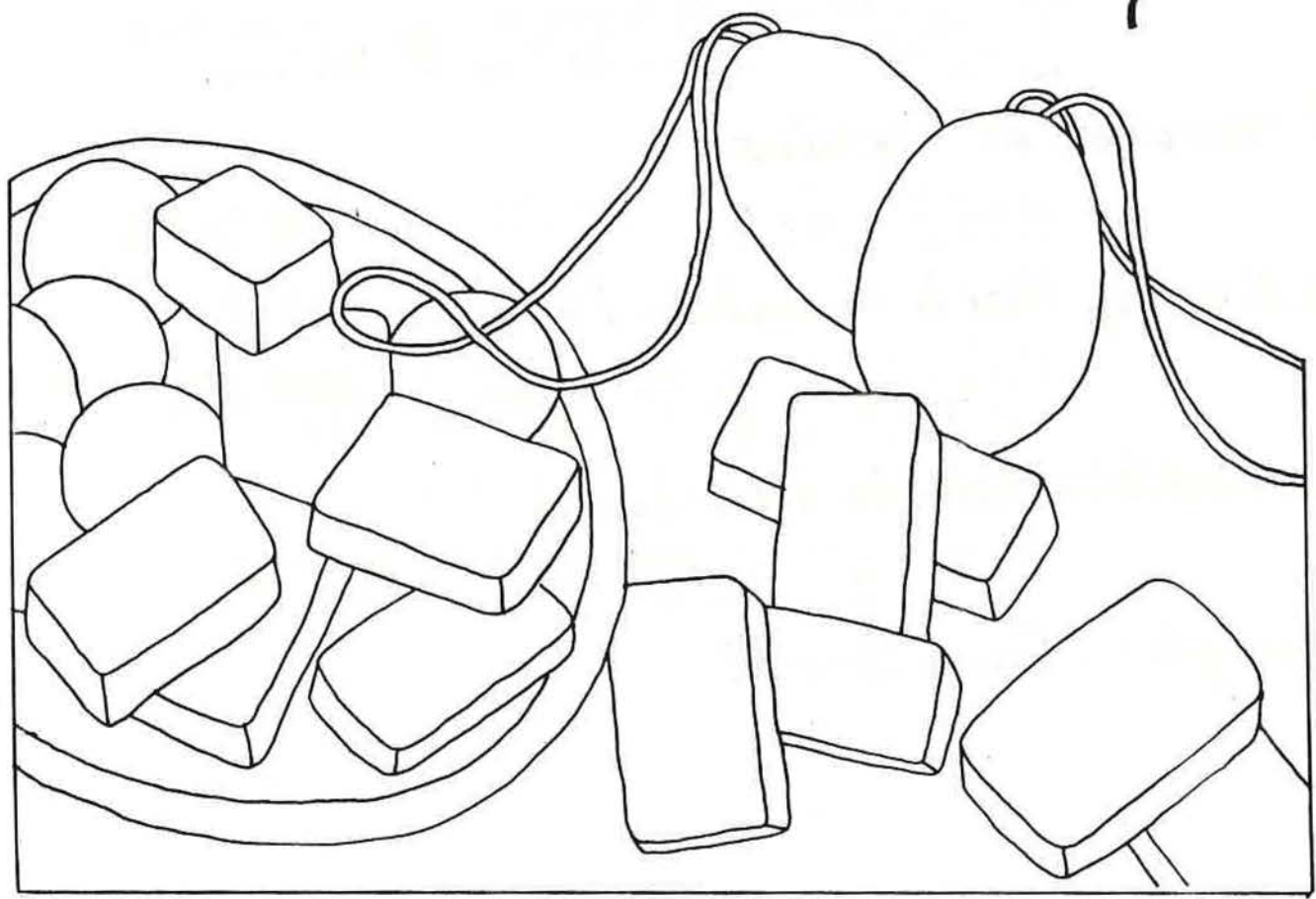


Ron

Back To Basics With Soap



This Homesteader's Illustrated How-To Series

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Everything you need to know for rendering oils, making lye, recipes for making basic and special soaps. My experiences and suggestions for selling your homemade soap.

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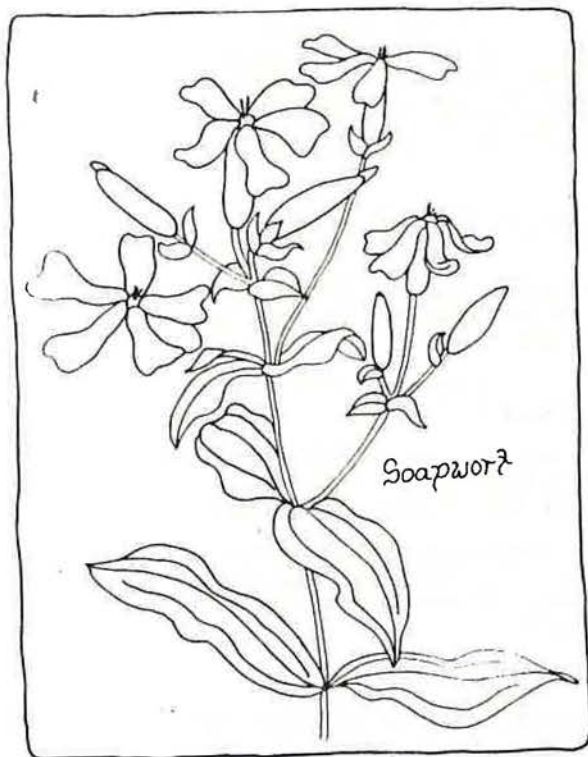
Pumpkin Corn Bread \$1.00

Back To Basics With Soap 1.

by: Sherri Hudson

Soap Plants

Pioneers and Indians didn't always have the time to make their lye, clarify the fat and stir the two up into soap. So on their journeys they used different soap plants they found along the trails.



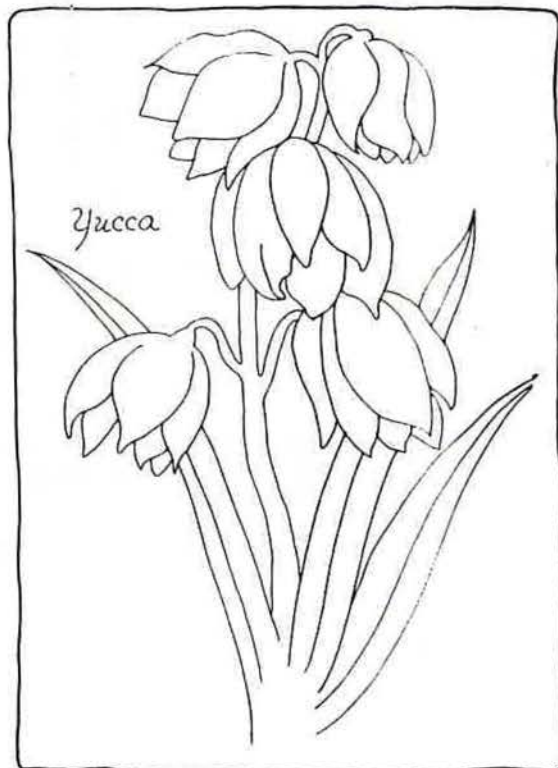
One of these plants is SOAPWORT or bouncing bet. *Saponaria officinalis*.

It grows 1-2 feet tall, wild along roadsides and railroads throughout most of the United States. It has a pink or white blossom, the petals are sometimes doubled, the leaves are smooth, as are the thick stems. The juice when mixed with water produces a lather. This lather is used as a shampoo to relieve itchy scalp or dandruff, it's good for skin sores, itchy feet or athletes foot. It can also be used to wash delicate clothing and woolens.

A plant that is still widely used in soaps is the YUCCA found in Mexico and the southeast in sandy soil, sterile ground, dunes and pine barrens.

The leaves are spiky and rigid. The bell shaped flowers are numerous and greenish white on a woody central stalk to form colonies along roadsides. When the roots are broken into pieces and mixed with water will form a soaplike mixture. The blossoms have a nice fragrance and are used in perfumes. Yucca Oil can be added to soap to add a soothing touch or dropped into bath water.

Dried, cut and sifted Soapwort and Yucca Root can be ordered from Aphrodisia, 282 Bleecker Street, New York, N.Y., 10014.



Makin' The Lye

When the traveling pioneers and Indians did settle down and make camp they made their own lye from woodashes from their cookfires. Almost any hardwood can be used but the strongest lye solution is made from oak and hickory. Lye made from wood ashes is known as potash. It consists of mostly potassium carbonate which is less caustic than commercial lye.

To make your own lye start with a large wooden container. If your lucky enough to have an old wooden pickle barrel you have the perfect container, but any wooden bucket will do. The bigger the container the more ashes you can add for the water to seep through to make a more concentrated lye solution.

1. Drill a hole near the bottom of the container to allow the solution to leach out.

2. Place the wooden container up on wooden or cinder blocks at an angle, so the hole is at the lowest point.

3. Place an enamel pot beneath the hole to catch the lye solution.

* Lye attacks aluminum and other metals so always use unchipped enamel, glass or wood when working with lye.

4. Place a layer of straw in the bottom of the wooden container. The straw will prevent the ashes from seeping out with the lye solution.

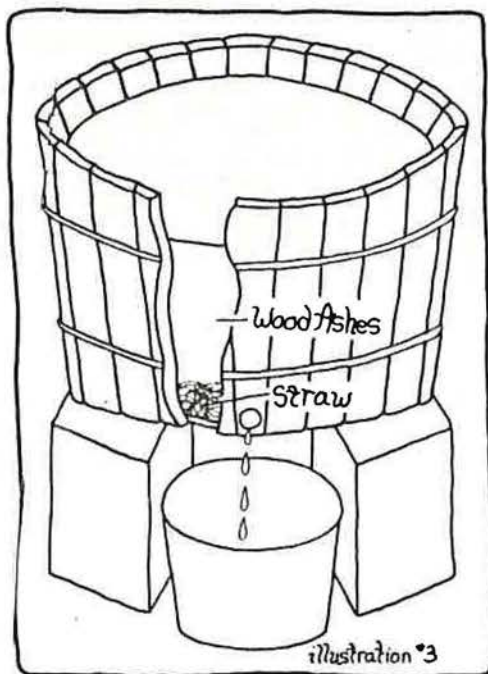
5. Then pack ashes into the container.

6. Heat clear rainwater, spring water or distilled water, to a boil and slowly pour a gallon over the ashes. When the seeping has stopped add another gallon of boiling water. Don't add the water too quickly or you will get ashes in your lye solution. Continue this step until the needed amount of solution is obtained. This process may take several days.

The lye solution is now ready to use in making soap or it may be stored in a cool dark place up to 1 week before using.

Commercial lye can be found among the cleaning supplies in the super market. Red Devil is the brand found in my area.

Don't get Lysol or other lye concoctions. Check for 100% pure lye.



Clarifying The Fat

3.

Here is a list of the fats and oils I have used in making soap.

Animal Fats:

Suet - is the fat around the kidney area of beef.
Tallow - is the fat around the beef muscle.
Lard - is the fat from hogs.

If you do your own butchering or have neighbors who do, you have plenty of animal fats to use. I checked the meat departments of the grocery stores in this area, they sell most of their fat to processing plants, but were willing to sell me small amounts for 39¢ a pound. After I rendered the fat down and clarified it, the price per pound averaged out to 78¢. I weighed this against the price of pure lard at 42¢ a pound. Readily available, already clarified and rendered, pure lard is a much better and simpler buy.

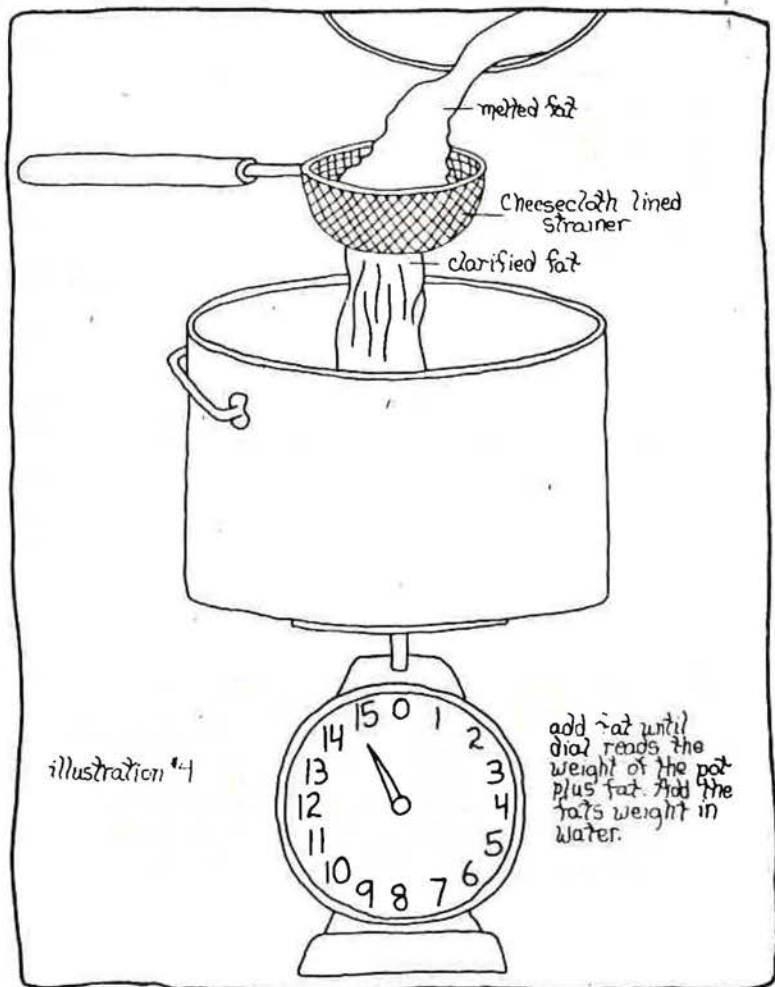
Vegetable Oils:

Olive Oil - makes a fine hard soap called Castile.
Coconut Oil - makes soap very soothing and creamy.
Castor Oil - is for a mild soothing soap with rich lather.
Bleached Palm Oil - is good for dry skin and hair.
Vegetable Oils such as Sesame, Peanut and Safflower Oils may also be used in creamy vegetarian soap.

To clarify the fat:

1. Slowly melt the fat in a cast iron kettle.
2. Strain it through two thicknesses of cheesecloth.
3. Weigh the fat and add the same amount of water. Stir well and bring to a boil.
4. Remove it from the heat and while stirring, add one quart of cold clear water. Set it aside to cool.
5. When it is firm, the clean fat on top is ready to make the soap.

If your not ready to make soap you can wrap the clean fat and freeze or store in a cool place.



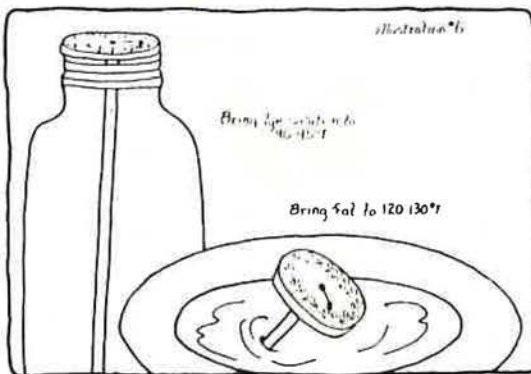
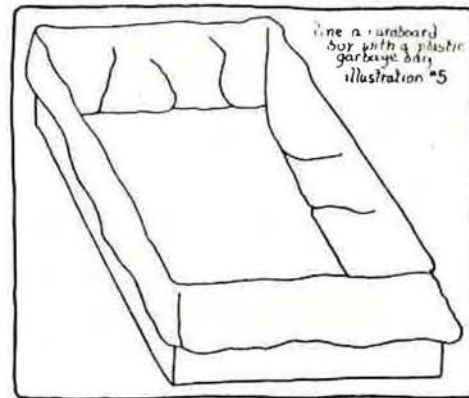
Makin' The Soap

4.

Roman legend states that soap was discovered accidentally in ancient times. On the top of Mt. Sapo (soap in Latin) animals were sacrificed to the gods. The wood ashes from the fire and the melted animal fat ran down the slope to the banks of the Tiber River. When the river was yellow is when the women would get their laundry its cleanest.

Homemade soap is very easy to make. It takes time but when its finished and aged its well worth it. Homemade soap smells great, cleans better and costs much less than store bought. You can also add the ingredients you want to do the job you need it for.

1. To make the soap first line a box with a plastic garbage bag or plastic wrap. I use boxes from the beer store that 4 six packs come in. They're just the right size for a batch. I line them with a triple, overlapping layer of plastic wrap.



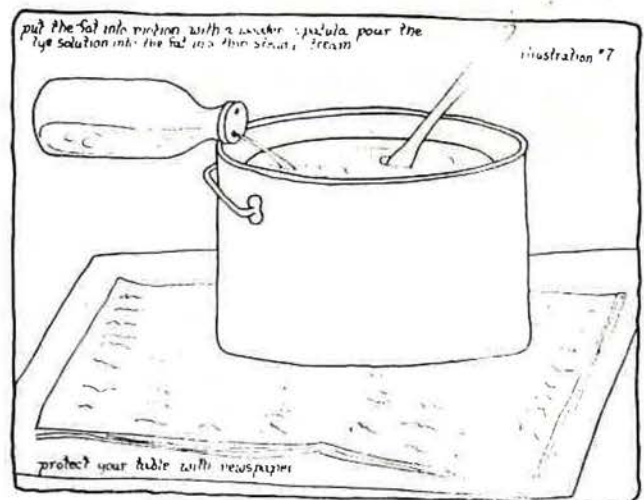
2. Meanwhile in an enamel pan or better yet a glass jar with two holes punched in the lid, one for air the other for pouring, dissolve the right amount of lye in the right amount of cold, clear water. The chemical reaction will produce heat of around 200°F and terrible fumes. Be careful not to get any of the dry lye on yourself, perspiration will dissolve the lye and cause a burn.

* If you do get a lye burn, wash well with clear water and rinse with diluted vinegar.

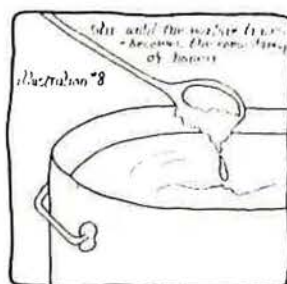
Let the solution cool to 90°-95°F. Use a glass dairy thermometer to test for accurate temperature. You can make your lye solution the day before and heat it up in a pan of warm water to 90°F. Lye is faster to heat it up than to cool it down.

If your using homemade lye, heat it up in a pan of warm water to 90°F.

3. To protect your table cover it with newspaper. When the lye and fat are both at the proper temperature put the fat into motion by stirring it with a wooden spatula, pour the lye solution into the fat in a thin, steady stream. If it is added too rapidly or stir too vigorously, separation will occur.

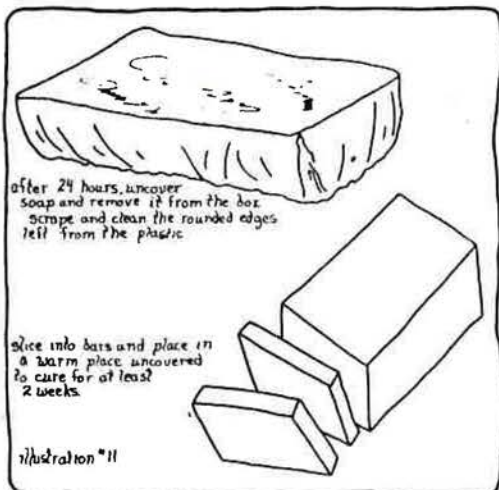
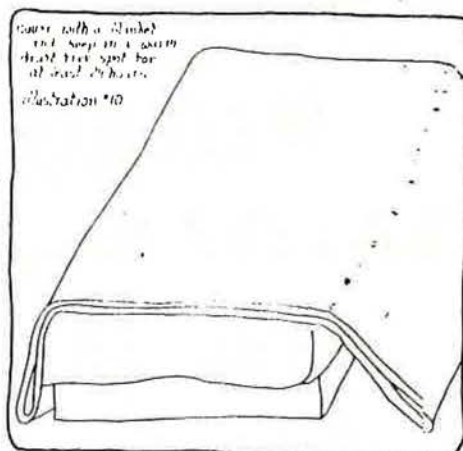


4. Stir until the mixture traces (becomes the consistency of honey). It should take 30 minutes to 1 hour. Keep the kettle in a warm spot out of drafts during this process.



5. Pour the thickened mixture into the plastic lined boxes, immediately after tracing occurs.

6. Cover the box with a blanket and keep it in a warm, draft free spot for at least 24 hours. I make all my soap in the winter so the best spot I have found is behind the wood stove. Try not to peak, sudden lose of temperature results in seperation.



7. After 24 hours, uncover the soap, remove it from the box, scrape and clean the rounded, wrinkled edges from the plastic. Slice it into bars and place it in a warm place, uncovered to cure for at least 2 weeks or more.

Soap improves with age.

Basic Soap Recipes

Follow the previous soap making directions to make these basic soap recipes.

Castor Oil Soap

Mild and soothing with rich lather.

9 ounces	castor oil	11 1/2 ounces	lye
22 ounces	olive oil	32 ounces	water
22 ounces	coconut oil		
32 ounces	other vegetable oil or lard		

Castile Soap

is a hard soap, making it good for carving. Named for the kingdom of Castile in north central Spain where it was first made.

25 ounces	olive oil	10 1/2 ounces	lye
58 ounces	vegetable oil	32 ounces	water

Coconut and Olive Oil Soap

is a cream colored soap with rich lather. This is a good soap for outdoor bathing in cold water.

23 ounces	olive oil	11 1/2 ounces	lye
23 ounces	coconut oil	32 ounces	water
23 ounces	other vegetable oil or lard		

Palm Oil Soap

is a good basic soap for dry skin and hair.

16 ounces	bleached palm oil	13 1/2 ounces	lye
32 ounces	olive oil	40 ounces	water
48 ounces	other vegetable oil or lard		

Vegetable Soap

is a very mild, gentle soap for vegetarians.

17 ounces	coconut oil	10 3/4 ounces	lye
24 ounces	crisco or other vegetable shortening	32 ounces	water
44 ounces	olive oil		

Reworking Your Soap

After your soap has cured 10 days to 2 weeks or to use up all the little left over pieces, it can be reworked to make all sorts of wonderful, personal soaps.

Flake your soap into flakes with a vegetable grater. Weigh out 4 ounces or 2 cups of flaked soap into a pot and slowly add 6 ounces or 1 cup of boiling water. Stir until the soap flakes dissolve. The soap should be a thick gel and clump free. After your soap has become a gel you can add your own creative touch. See the recipes that follow for some ideas.

For soap that floats gently fold extra air into the soap when the flakes dissolve. The trapped air bubbles will make it float.

When you've got your soap put together pour it into a small plastic lined box or molds. In about 5-8 minutes the soap will be cool enough to shape into balls or ovals by scooping up some of the partially jelled soap and rolling it between your palms to form the desired shape. If you are making Soap on a Rope, now is the time to insert the rope. In 30 minutes the soap will be cooled and jelled and firm enough to cut into bars.

Ingredients For Special Soaps

These are only the tip of the iceberg for soap ingredients but they are the ones I have tried and used:

- Almond Meal - for babies with diaper rash, also for oily skin.
- Corn Meal - is slightly abrasive making it good for cleaning.
- Oatmeal - is good to ease the itch of herpes and its great for complexions.
- Milk - (dried and powdered) is soothing and nourishing.
- Honey - is soothing for burns and sensitive skin.
- Cold Cream - is great for facial soaps.
- Wheat Germ Oil and Vitamin E - use for troubled skin.
- Lanolin - for dry skin.
- Aloe - for sensitive skin.
- Lavender - is nice for washing lingerie.
- Clover, Comfrey, Elder Flower, and Slippery Elm - are healing to dry skin.
- Chamomile, Rose, Witchhazel and Yarrow - for oily skin.

To use dried herbs and flowers in soap, make a strong infusion by pouring 2 pints of boiling water over 1 ounce of herb. Cover with a lid and steep until the water has cooled to room temperature. Strain out the herbs and add enough cold water to the infusion to make enough water for a single batch. Use this cold infusion to dissolve the lye.

Other liquids such as honey and cold cream should be heated to room temperature and added to the oils right after the lye.

Dry ingredients such as cornmeal should be added immediately after tracing occurs.

Herbal Soaps with Fruits and Vegetables

Don't try to introduce fruits and vegetables into the soap mixture, it doesn't work. The lye will decompose the fruits and vegetables. Use oils or infusions. Some nice soaps can be made with Strawberries, Lettuce, Cucumbers, Carrots and Avocados.

Cut 4 ounces of the botanical into pieces, add 1 cup of water and simmer in the top of a double boiler for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat, steep until cool, strain and remove any particles. Shave 16 ounces of flaked soap and add to the liquid. Heat until the soap melts and stir very well. Add 1/4 teaspoon of the appropriate oil, stir well. Pour into molds or let cool slightly and shape into balls or ovals or cut into bars.

Scents For Soap

Scents can also be used in your soap. Flower scents seem to lose their scent in soap and herb scents are sometimes irritating to the skin. Bergamot Oil and Bitter Almond Oil is very often irritating. Scents also smell somewhat different after the soap has hardened. The oils are always affected by the lye plus there is the fatty smell to overcome.

Add essential oils in small amounts to your soap before it is poured, mix in well, a slotted spoon works well.

Bayberry, Bay and Carnation are spicy and appealing to men. Cedarwood, Oakmoss, Patchouli, Sandalwood and Vetiver are woody scents. Jasmine, Rose and Honeysuckle are sweet and floral. Lavender, Rosemary and Sage are herbal scents. Chamomile is sweet, nutty and slightly spicy. Cinnamon, Allspice and Sassafras are spicy. Peppermint and Spearmint are refreshing scents. Citronella is repelling to insects but pleasing and refreshing to humans.

Coloring For Soap

Color can be added in two ways. Powdered herbs, spices, flowers, barks and roots. Premix the powders with a little soap then stir the dyed soap back into the batch. Another way to add color is to make an infusion by pouring 2 pints of boiling water over 1 ounce of whole or crumbled herb. Cover with a lid and steep until the water has cooled to room temperature and/or reached the wanted color. Strain out the herbs and add enough cold water to the infusion to make enough water for a single batch. Use this cold infusion to dissolve the lye.

Brown - Acorn, Cocoa, Coffee and Juniper Berry
 Tan - Honey
 Yellow - Onion Skins, Saffron and Turmeric
 Gold - Goldenrod, Marigold and Poke Berry
 Orange - Safflower
 Red - Henna, Hibiscus and Madder
 Purple - Indigo
 Green - Chlorophyll (can usually be found in health food stores).
 Black - Sumac

Candle dyes, fabric dyes and liquid blueing can also be added, but I don't recommend them for soap. Food coloring seems to leave an oily film on the soap.

To give your soap a marbled effect, gently swirl the coloring into the soap.

Special Soap Recipes

Make one of the basic soap recipes the following the reworking directions, turn your basic soap into a Special Soap with one of the following recipes.

Rosemary Lavender Soap

8 ounces flaked soap
11 ounces boiling water

add: an infusion of 2 Tablespoons each dried Rosemary, Bay and Lavender or 1/2 teaspoon each Rosemary and Lavender Oil and 1/4 teaspoon Bay Oil.

Chamomile Soap

8 ounces flaked soap
11 ounces boiling water

add: an infusion of 1/4 Cup dried chamomile flowers or 1/4 teaspoon Chamomile Oil

Yellow Rose Glycerin Soap

8 ounces flaked soap
11 ounces boiling water

add: an infusion of 1/4 Cup Safflower also add 1/4 teaspoon Rose oil and 1 teaspoon glycerin.

Lemon Turmeric Soap

8 ounces flaked soap
11 ounces boiling water

add: 1 teaspoon powdered Turmeric and 1/4 teaspoon Lemon oil.

Cinnamon Soap

8 ounces flaked soap
11 ounces boiling water

add: 1/8 teaspoon Lavender oil, 1/2 teaspoon Bergamot and Sassafras oils and 1 teaspoon Cinnamon Oil

Rose Potpourri Soap

The natural oils in homemade soap will extract the fragrance from fresh or dried materials. Place fully cured bars or balls in a jar filled with potpourri. Store the scented soap among your linens to scent the fabric until you need to use it.

Cold Cream Rosemary Soap

This is my favorite facial soap

16 ounces flaked soap
12 ounces boiling water

add: 1/4 teaspoon Rosemary oil and 2 Tablespoons Cold cream

Oatmeal Scrub Bar

16 ounces flaked soap
12 ounces boiling water

add: 2 Tablespoons quick cooking rolled oats, 1 Tablespoon coarse ground Corn meal, 1/4 teaspoon oil for scent, 1/8 teaspoon powdered Mace for color.

Health Bar

16 ounces flaked soap
12 ounces boiling water

add: 1/2 teaspoon wheat germ oil and
1/4 teaspoon liquid vitamin E.

Lanolin Soap

for dry skin. Use deodorized lanolin or
it will end up smelling like sheep wool.

16 ounces flaked soap
10 ounces boiling water

add: 2 Tablespoons melted deodorized
lanolin.

Comfrey Aloe Soap

for sensitive skin

4 ounces Flaked soap
6 ounces boiling water

add: an infusion of 2 ounces Comfrey Root
and 1 ounce Comfrey leaves also
add 1 Cup Aloe Vera gel.

Milk and Honey Soap

soothing and nourishing

16 ounces flaked soap
12 ounces boiling water

add: 2 Tablespoons dried powdered
milk, 1 Tablespoon honey

Rosewater Soap

for oily skin

16 ounces flaked soap
8 ounces boiling water

add: 4 ounces Rosewater

Athletes Foot Soap

16 ounces flaked soap
10 ounces boiling water

add: an infusion of 1 ounce Red Clover,
1/2 ounce each Mint and Soapbark.

Deodorant Soap

16 ounces flaked soap
10 ounces boiling water

add: an infusion of 1 ounce Witchhazel,
White Willow Bark or Cresote Bush.

Outdoorsy Soap

take this one camping, use it if your
bothered by gnats while working in the
garden. Can also be used as a deodorant soap

16 ounces flaked soap
12 ounces boiling water

add: 3 drops each oils of Rosemary,
Peppermint and Lavender and
2 drops each oils of Bergamot
and Citronella.

Almond Meal Soap

good degreaser, gentle abrasive
and good for removing dirt
from pores.

16 ounces flaked soap
12 ounces boiling water

add: 1/4 Cup Almond Meal

More Special Soaps

Laundry Soap

8 ounces flaked soap
 1/4 cup borax

Oil Soap for washing natural fibers and leather

4 ounces flaked soap
 1 ounce 75% alcohol
 4 ounces Rosemary oil

Set in a warm spot like a window until the soap melts. Mix well and store in an air tight container.

Liquid Soap to use as shampoo

4 ounces flaked soap
 18 ounces boiling water
 1/2 cup borax

Stir and boil in a double boiler for a few minutes or until soap melts. Remove from the heat, let cool to a gel. Pour it into containers and keep covered. The harder the soap the more water it will take to soften it.

Dish Soap

Add: 1/4 teaspoon Lemon oil to the Liquid Soap recipe above.

Soap Makin' as a Cottage Industry

13.

Start your business out with two or three soaps that you use and enjoy personally. Design or have designed for you an attractive label. The label should include the product name, ingredients any other product information and your business name and address. If you are going to wholesale your soap, have a wholesale price list. If you are retailing (especially through mail order) have a retail list. These price lists should be attractive, include the product name, ingredients, any other product information, your business name and address, postage rates, ordering information and a greeting from you is a nice touch.

I have found the best time to make my soap is during the off season between Christmas and March. There seems to be more interrupted time to make my product. Stores start stocking up their shelves again in the spring and retail customers seem to start buying again in warm weather.

The products you sell should be handled by you personally without a middleman. This way you know your soap is being handled with the highest regards. You will also be making the full price for it. Plus it's really nice to know the shop owners who are selling your soap or the customers who are buying it.

Set the highest standard for your soap products. Don't try to sell your soap until you can reach and keep these standards. Never sell soap which isn't completely cured and dried, which is discolored and broken. Save your seconds to barter with your friends or to use yourself. It is important to your business to start out and keep a good name for a quality product. It feels good to have repeat customers who feel you are honest and have a quality soap.

It is also not to make promises to your customers, you can't keep.

PRICING

When pricing your soap check around at craft shows and gift shops to compare retail soap prices. Send for mail order catalogs to check out their prices. Add up your cost for making the soap, double the cost which will give you a wholesale price, double the wholesale price for the retail price. Compare these prices to see if you are competitive.

WHOLESALE

Choose a town with many gift shops, close to you (less than 50 miles to keep down traveling costs). The size of the town isn't important, only the number of gift shops. A tourist town is full of gift shops and is usually a successful place to set up wholesale accounts. When you are traveling be sure to take your products and price lists with you to set up wholesale accounts which are long distances. If the shop owners seem interested but aren't ready to place an order, leave a sample and a price list, then when you return home be sure to follow up with a phone call or letter. Natural food stores are another possibility to wholesale your soap to.

When wholesaling you may have to start out by letting the shop keeper sell your soap on consignment until they are sure it will sell. I don't courage this or let this arrangement last longer than a couple weeks. Shop owners seem to be more involved with selling products that they have their money tied up in.

RETAIL

If you want to retail your homemade soaps, it is very important to be located on a main road and to let the public know about you. An attractive eye catching, easy to read sign with your business name and an indication of what you are selling. Do not make your sign too wordy or motorists will not be able to read it. The lettering should be large enough to catch the eye.

With a store of your own you will have to deal with the public so take this in account when you are putting up your sign and inviting people into your environment. Be personable with your customers. Have a delightful place set aside for displaying your products for sale.

Since we live in such a rural location I find mail order is the way to go.

I hope my tips will help you have a successful cottage soap industry.

Bird Creek Hollar

R.R. # 3 Box 210

Sneedville, TN

37869