



## Soap Making for the Beginner, Part I

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| 2/23/2012 9:09:56 PM

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If you have never made your own soap before, this the first of a two-part lesson. It is soap making for the total beginner. I have been making soap for years and recently decided to try to develop a recipe for a reliable batch of soap using ingredients I can easily obtain, instead of ordering exotic oils by mail. I am guessing this would make it easier for other people who are curious about making soap but don't know how to begin.

Traditionally, people used a combination of wood ash and lard to make soap. The Soap Factory (<http://www.alcasoft.com/soapfact/history.html>) has an interesting account of the history and chemistry of soap making and the traditional methods of rendering fat and obtaining potash from wood ash. I applaud the homesteader who chooses to make soap using materials at hand and traditional methods. Those of us who want to make things easier need to purchase their materials. In place of wood ash we can easily find lye at any hardware store. The oils are more difficult. Many homemade soap recipes use coconut oil, palm oil and olive oil as the base ingredients. Soap made from these oils is nice and hard, it lathers well and it is soothing to the skin. The problem for me is that it is not that easy to find hydrogenated (solid at room temperature) coconut oil and palm oil where I live. When I am going to make a large quantity of soap, like many batches for holiday gifts, I don't mind ordering oils by the mail from Columbus Foods. They have a "Soaper's Choice" (<http://soaperschoice.com/>) area of their website with just about any exotic oil you could want in quantities as small as 7 pounds. For smaller and one-time batches, this is not practical. You can't store oil for long periods of time because it gets rancid, especially in my very hot (in the summer) Chicago home. I thought maybe other people have avoided making soap due to the difficulty of obtaining supplies. Also, some people do not want to use palm oil because of environmental concerns (<http://palmoilandtheenvironment.blogspot.com/>). I decided to develop a very simple and basic soap recipe for the beginner using supplies you can buy easily. We still want to make a batch of soap that is hard, produces lather and is gentle to the skin, but we are going to use oils that you can find at the grocery store and pharmacy.



For Part 1 of this soap making tutorial you will gather all of your materials. Next week you can combine them into a batch of soap.

### Equipment


- Lightweight bowl to hold oils while you weigh them
- Glass jars, one to hold lye, one to hold water. The water jar should be around the size of a pickle jar or if it is a canning glass a #19 Ball jar is good
- Rubber spatula
- Digital kitchen scale (Try to borrow one if you don't have one)
- Candy thermometer (able to withstand very high temperatures)
- Pot to heat the oil in. This must be stainless steel or no-stick. An aluminum pan will react with the lye
- Paper towels
- Plastic shoe box or a similar vessel (like a small cake pan) to use as mold. Line with cling wrap or wax paper
- Hand stirrer (also called immersion blender.) You can find inexpensive models for under \$20

- Newspaper or something to protect work surface

## Materials



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-  23 ounces (by weight) of olive oil. The photo shows extra virgin oil. In fact, the best olive oil to use for soap is the lowest-quality "pomace" oil so try to find the cheapest oil possible. Pomace can often be found in tins at Middle Eastern or Greek groceries or Aldi.
  - 13 ounces (by weight) corn oil
  - 4.8 ounces (by weight) red devil lye (don't weigh it until part II)
  - 2- one ounce cocoa butter sticks (look at a drug store. (They can be found at Walgreens or other drug stores in the cosmetics department)

Plus, optional...

**Herbs**- you may add small amounts of dried herbs to your soap for texture and color. The herbs will not add any scent to the soap so don't worry about how they smell. Remember that the lye is so harsh you will not usually retain bright colors from your herbs and instead need to aim for a range of natural colors if you are planning on using herbs for color. (You can also purchase synthetic soap colors at crafts stores to get any color of the rainbow.) For example, lovely purple lavender flowers turn brown after they mix with the soap. Some herbs that retain a bit of color follow:

- Cocoa powder - for brown tones
- Paprika -for pale pink
- Turmeric spice -for yellow
- Oregano - pale green
- Spirulina powder (seaweed) - green
- Oatmeal - adds no color but is said to make soap more soothing
- Mixed tea- if you find it hard to obtain dried herbs you can buy a mixed tea like "Sleepytime: and crush that up.

**Scents** - you can use either essential oils or fragrance oils to scent your soap. That's it. Do not add old perfume, body spray, or anything else. Those products contain extra ingredients that will interfere with the soap making process.

**Essential oils** - all natural and may have beneficial qualities. They are expensive. You can find them at health food stores or at a much better price online at places like Glorybee Foods (<http://naturalcrafts.glorybee.com/shop/Essential-Oils/>). You will need to add at least 1 1/2 tablespoons or more of essential oils for this batch to be scented. Essential oils to steer clear of are citrus oils. They smell great initially but fade quickly. I like to use strong oils that are on the less-expensive side like rosemary, lavender, patchouli, and cinnamon.

**Fragrance oils** - fragrance oils can be purchased at craft stores, some health food stores like Whole Foods, or online. They are less expensive than essential oils and made from artificial ingredients. For this recipe you would use around 4 teaspoons of fragrance oils. Occasionally fragrance oils can cause strange reactions when you make soap. This happens rarely, but is a risk you take in order to save enormous quantities of money.



**Safety:** You will be working with very dangerous lye to make your soap. Exercise extreme caution. Plan on wearing gloves and eye protection. You can wear a face mask when you stir the lye into the water or otherwise avoid breathing in the fumes. Keep your work area clear of children, pets, and food or dishes. Do not use tinfoil or aluminum when making soap. Use glass jars, stainless steel bowls and pans. Store your extra lye someplace very safe with the child-safety lid on tight. I clear out my entire kitchen when making soap so that I can use the sink to hold everything. That way if something overflows it will go down the drain and not all over the counters and floor.

**Last step before Part II** - line your mold with plastic wrap or wax paper.

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**Next week:** we will melt the oils, dissolve the lye and combine them to make a batch of soap!

**Continue to Part II: Soap-Making for the Beginner** (<https://www.motherearthnews.com/diy/soap-making-for-the-beginner-part-ii>).

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**www.EasyWoodwork.org5/27/2018 9:36:31 PM**

I used the plans at [WWW.EASYWOODWORK.ORG](http://WWW.EASYWOODWORK.ORG) to build my own – I highly recommend you visit that website and check their plans out too. They are detailed and super easy to read and understand unlike several others I found online. The amount of plans there is mind-boggling... there's like 16,000 plans or something like that for tons of different projects. Definitely enough to keep me busy with projects for many more years to come haha. Go to [WWW.EASYWOODWORK.ORG](http://WWW.EASYWOODWORK.ORG) if you want some additional plans :)

**jamila2/9/2014 2:07:05 PM**

I'm making my first batch of soap, and after a lot of research, I decided that this is a great recipe to start with. I am interested in adding cocoa powder to get a brown color, and oatmeal for texture. What do you recommend for amounts of those, and when do I add them? at trace? Thanks for you help!

**Nick Story3/18/2013 12:29:32 PM**