



Soap-Making for the Beginner Part III - Giving Lard a Try

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1/7/4/2012 6:48:57 PM

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Earlier in this blog I gave instructions for making soap titled "Soap-Making for the Beginner" Part I (<https://www.motherearthnews.com/diy/soap-making-for-the-beginner-part-1>) and II (<https://www.motherearthnews.com/diy/soap-making-for-the-beginner-part-ii>). My intent was to give good, clear directions for the novice soap maker. I thought that if I created a reliable, versatile recipe using materials people can find close to home it would make the process more accessible to everyone. When I started making soap many years ago it was really daunting to me to have to locate coconut oil and palm oil in order to get my hobby started. The recipe I provided in that blog post only uses olive oil, corn oil and cocoa butter sticks from the drug store. Problem solved.

The only drawback is that using large quantities of olive oil is expensive. So, here is a second beginner recipe using an ingredient you can find anywhere: lard!

I have always used only vegetable oils to make soap. However I spotted lard for sale at a store near my house recently and so I decided to try something new. Lard is available to everyone, it is very inexpensive (under \$4 for 40 ounces or free in some instances) and it is one of the things soap used to be commonly made from. This History of Soap Timeline (<http://customsoap.com/university/history.html>) gives more details about how different cultures made soap in the past. Western Europeans usually had cast off animal fats to use for their soap making. Mediterranean countries with ample olive oil developed the Castile soap, and so on. It is an interesting read and made me think about giving a nod to my English and Irish ancestors by making a fat-based soap.

Some people will shy away from animal-based soap because of their personal beliefs, while other people regard using lard as an efficient way to use every part of the animal. There is a very informative and civilized discussion on the topic on this Candle and Soap Making Forum. (<http://candleandsoap.about.com/u/ua/soapingoilprofiles/animaloildiscussion.01.htm>)

If you are ready to try lard, out here is the method I used. I added in some castor oil and olive oil to improve the final product. Lard is known as sort of a utilitarian soap ingredient: it gets the job done but does not offer a ton of conditioning or lather. The castor oil is supposed to increase the lather. I located a tiny 2 ounce jar at the pharmacy. The olive oil should add some moisturizing properties.



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To make this lard/castor oil/olive oil batch you will refer to Soap making for Beginners part I (<https://www.motherearthnews.com/diy/soap-making-for-the-beginner-part-1>) and II (<https://www.motherearthnews.com/diy/soap-making-for-the-beginner-part-ii>). Please review safety guidelines, assemble your materials before you dive in, and give yourself a clean workplace that is separate from where your food and children and pets can stray onto it. You will substitute the amount of lye and oils provided in this recipe but otherwise follow the same procedure used in part I and II. The only time you may diverge from the previous batch is at the final step when you are mixing the oils and lye together and waiting for them to trace. I found that with my lard recipe this step took forever. Hand stirrers are not designed to be in use for 15 or 20 minutes straight. I have actually burned them out in the past with overlong stirring. So I usually stir for a few minutes then let the stirrer cool down before proceeding. This time it was so reluctant to trace I wound up using a blender in batches to get it to solidify a bit. Using a blender is not normally advised because the lid could fly off and you could be injured. I had a good form fitting lid and a glass blender and I filled it only half way each time. After a few pulses it traced and I poured it into the mold little by little. Because I was pouring it in batches I was able to make a marbled soap. When I got to the last blender full of oils and lye I added in some cocoa powder to make a pretty brown color. Then when I poured this on top of the other, cream colored soap it made a pretty swirly effect. If you wind up using a blender don't forget to add your scent and don't over mix. If it gets to be too solid it will be hard to get it out and put it into your mold. Mix it in quick bursts and constantly check it to see if it has reached a very slight trace (where you can drizzle in some of the liquid and it sits on the surface before sinking in.) When it even slightly traces, pour it as fast as you can. Clean out the blender as soon as your mold is covered and settled. If you let the soap solidify in there you will have a huge hassle getting it cleaned up. I speak from experience!

Recipe

- 25 ounces lard (called manteca if you are at Mexican grocery store.)
- 9 ounces olive oil
- 2 ounces castor oil
- 4.65 ounces lye
- 35 ounces room-temperature water

If you would like more information on historical soap making techniques, the Mother Earth News archive contains an article from 1972 teaching you How to Build a Lye Leaching Barrel. (<https://www.motherearthnews.com/homesteading-and-livestock/how-to-make-soap-from-ashes-zmaz72jzfzfre>) (<https://www.motherearthnews.com/homesteading-and-livestock/how-to-make-soap-from-ashes-zmaz72jzfzfre>)

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