

Soapmaking ... Where to Find Ingredients, Etc.

Compiled by Kathy Miller - <http://millerssoap.com/soapingred.html>

Fats: I usually get pure beef kidney fat from a local butcher, who can order it in 40# quantities (quite a bit, but it freezes well). If you tell a butcher why you want it, they will often save fat scraps for you for little to no charge (it would be a nice gesture to bring them a piece of soap after it's cured). These are a bit smellier to render, but not too bad. If you are counting your pennies or don't want a huge hunk of fat, that might be the way to go for beef tallow. You can also save drippings from frying meat (in the freezer between additions) and eventually "wash" them (not my preference, but directions are given on this page). I wouldn't recommend saving poultry fat...it's too soft and spongy. If you know anyone who has ordered a side of pork or beef, you can have them give you the ground lard or a piece of kidney fat, if it's available. The butcher usually doesn't have people who want to keep the kidney fat, but if it's part of the animal they purchased, they are entitled to it. Otherwise, he sells the leftovers to a rendering outfit.

You can get vegetable oils and *shortenings at the supermarket. Also, lard is usually available either in the dairy case or near the shortenings and baking goods. If you can't find it at the store, ask someone and they can order it for you. I've purchased it usually in one pound packages, but it is also available in a 5# pail. If you have a nice supermarket with a health/organic section you might be able to purchase unusual oils and coconut oil there for a cheaper price than if you go to a health food store (the other source for vegetable oils...particularly coconut). We have a nice market for this in Poulsbo, WA - Central Market. They also have some essential oils there. Other oils like palm will probably need to be mail ordered and there are some sources listed in the links section, although some of you can find local sources for this in ethnic sections of your grocery stores (look in Middle East, Asian or African sections). In that instance, it will probably be packaged as "Vegetable Ghee." I have gotten olive oil at a very good price at our local Costco warehouse store. For soapmaking, get the cheapest and lightest in color (usually pressed with heat after the initial cold pressing, which yields a tastier and higher priced oil). They also had huge containers of soybean and canola oil, if you are using those for soapmaking. There's a recipe that calls for this on the "Soapy Success" page. I read that soap made with soybean oil cures to a nice white and canola will cure to an off-white pinkish color. Some people prefer to use those oils over olive because of the olive oil smell that often lingers in the finished bar. If you can pool costs with other soapmakers, you can probably get most of these things cheaper by mail order if you get HUGE quantities. The shipping is what can kill you!

*Some soaps made with mostly shortening can turn out kind of a yucky gray color. Try to mix different fats together and use sources that are as free from additives as possible. Shortenings made with soybean, canola and/or cottonseed oils are said to be the best.

Something to check out! If you have a restaurant/business supply in your area (often called a "**Cash and Carry**") you should check that out as a source for materials. Our local Cash and Carry allows the general public to purchase things whether or not you own a business. You just have to have the folding green stuff in your hot little hand! I just looked at our Cash and Carry and there were several things there of interest to the soapmaker. I brought home a 45# bucket of processed white coconut oil for about \$46 (1/3 the cost of getting the small jars at the market/health food store). That's a LOT of coconut and if you do this you might want to split it up with others. They also sell coconut oil prepared for corn popping. There were a couple of kinds and a common one is "VO-POP" (thanks to Rachael of the Latherings Board for this tip). It came in a 25# bucket for about \$25. They've added flavorings and beta carotene to the corn popping coconut oil so your soap will have a yellow color, but she said it was quite pretty. They also had olive oil and LARGE containers of cooking oils. Be sure to check the labels for the type of oil content. There were some other corn popping preparations that were *not* coconut oil based. While there, I found a plastic tub that looked just right for my size batch of soap ... the depth of the dish below the lip was about a bar of soap wide. It's a somewhat rigid plastic, but with the use of Saran wrap, it should work just fine getting the soap to come out. I asked if they could get palm or palm kernel oil and the woman who waited on me said she would find out if it could be special ordered. If you find an outlet like this, it will save you a lot of shipping. In our state, there's no additional tax on food products, but that can vary from state to state.

Glycerin: Can be ordered from any soapmaking supplier or purchased in smaller quantities in the pharmacy section of most drugstores (where you can also find some oils, like peppermint, cinnamon, clove and eucalyptus). You will probably find it in 4 or 8 ounce sized bottles. Some drugstores carry larger sizes near the cosmetics/lotions and creams section.

Beeswax: This can be ordered from any of the companies listed in the links that sell soapmaking and candle supplies. I'm told that you can purchase it at Ben Franklin Craft Stores in the candlemaking section (along with candle dyes...thanks to Tina for this information!). Michael's craft stores (in the Northwest) also carry it in several forms. Another reader sent this note: "A lot of times, you can find bees wax at honey stands at Farmer's Markets. I prefer buying the wax there, as it is usually more fragrant than what you can get at a craft store." (Jeff)

Cocoa Butter: This can also be ordered from any of the companies offering soap supplies and oils. From another soaper... "BTW, if you ever need cocoa butter, I found some at K-mart in the African American beauty supplies section...and it was pretty cheap too. It smelled just like chocolate." -Michelle :)

Lye: (In the U.K. this is marketed as "Caustic Soda." Be sure it's 100% Sodium hydroxide.) Lewis Lye can be purchased here (U.S.) at almost any grocery store near the drain openers in the household/cleaning supplies section. Be sure you buy 100 per cent lye and NOT drain opener that is a combination of lye crystals and aluminum shavings, like Drano. If you can't find it for some reason, ask if they can order it for you. It's pretty standard fare. You'd be amazed at how many uses for lye there are...I've even used it in making hominy before and know a German lady who used a weak lye solution in making her soft pretzels. Some of the suppliers on the soapmaking links page sell bulk lye, for serious soapmakers. There is a hazardous materials fee tacked onto the shipping charges. If you are buying lye in Canada, the brand is "Gillette." It can be found at many grocery and True Value Hardware stores. In Ontario, Canada, Home Hardware, which sells Gillettes, also has a product called *Home Lye Crystals* for use on farms, etc. It is sold in 3 kg plastic containers and retails for about \$18 CDN - much cheaper than the other. Some places insist that you order a box of 4, others (beginning with Aurora on Yonge St. north of Toronto) sell it by the container (info from Wendy S. ... *thanks!*).

Fragrance: Essential oils and high quality fragrance oils make the nicest fragrance in soap and you can find them at a health food store or at many mail order companies, some of which are listed below (*Sweet Cakes*, on the Internet, sells wonderful fragrance oils). Whatever you use, be sure it's an oil-based agent with no alcohol in it. Liquid candle scents can be used in soap (more is usually needed) and I have purchased those in the past from the *Pourette Company*. Wax based candle scents such as you typically find at a craft store are useless for soapmaking. They are hard to incorporate without melting into the fat when it is at its hottest and by the time the soap is finished, the scent is shot! Another possible source for a few essential oils is in the pharmacy. Some oils have pharmaceutical value and can be purchased reasonably...I'm thinking of clove, cinnamon, eucalyptus and peppermint oils in particular. Again, read the label and make sure they have not added alcohol to the oil. Another good source of essential oils and blends at reasonable prices is *A Garden Eastward* (Internet). As a general rule of thumb, you will need from 1.5 to 4 ounces of fragrance or essential oil to scent an 8 pound batch of cold processed soap, depending on the strength of the oils used (2 T. is equal to one ounce of oil). The strongest common essential oils are peppermint, rosemary, cinnamon, clove, spearmint and bitter almond. I probably left some out, but those are the ones you will use less of. Here's a general rule of thumb, although you may not want to use this much...it's personal preference (.5 oz. = 1 T.):

Average Essential Oil	.7 oz. per pound of oils used in soap
Strong Essential Oil (like cinnamon, clove, mint, etc.)	.4 oz. per pound
Citrus Essential Oils	.9 oz. per pound
Average Fragrance Oil	.5 oz. (1 T.) per pound
Strong Fragrance Oil	1 tsp. per pound

If you want to create some of your own blends, here's a great tip from the *Latherings Soap Forum*:

From Toni of *Countryside Soap*: "Here is how I create blends. Take a coffee filter and fold twice in half so you have a nice pointed end. Now take oils that you would like to blend and a dropper. WRITE DOWN everything you do!!!! Try 3 drops

for top note 2 drops for middle note and 1 drop for bottom note (this just to get you started). Now place the coffee filter in a jar (I use a jelly jar). Place in your cabinet and check it in a couple of days and see how you like it. You might want to go back and a drop of this or that. I write everything down on a label and place on jar."

To learn more about the properties of the various oils, which combine well together, and which note they are, check out this wonderful resource at *A Garden Eastward*.

Some Favorite Fragrance Suppliers on the Internet:

A Garden Eastward (mainly essential oils): <http://addy.com/brinkley/index.html>

Mint Meadow Country Oils (wonderful mint oils and blends they grow themselves... also some fragrance oils available): <http://members.tripod.com/~mintmeadow/index.html>

Sweet Cakes (fragrance oils tested for reliability in cold process soap): <http://www.sweetcakes.com>

Brambleberry (tested, based in Western Washington): <http://www.brambleberry.com>

Color: Candle color works very well for soap when mixed into the fats before the lye solution is added (if it's wax based - melted first, separately, in a few tablespoons of the fat and then poured into the rest of the melted fat). You can find these at a hobby store or mail order them from companies such as Pourette. Some people use CRAYONS in the same way, but it takes more since they are rather dilute and you don't always get the end color you are expecting. Some experimentation might be in order. Generally I will suggest you use 1 to 3 regular crayons for the size of the recipes you will find on this site, depending on how strong a color you desire.

Here's some good info from Rachael Levitan (the queen of experimentation) on which crayons do and don't work!:

The only crayons that work are CERULEAN blue, yellow, orange, neon pink (from the neon box), brown, black and white... so you have to mix your own from these.

Prussian blue and red DON'T ...so purple, reds, violet-reds, burgundies, navy, blue, midnight blue, green (yellow and Prussian blue) and anything with red or Prussian blue (just blue in crayola language) don't work, so all the violets are out too. (*I have heard from a couple of people that got a nice pink from red crayon...so the jury might be out on this or red crayons may vary by brand...Kathy M.*)

Any color made with the Cerulean blue is great, the blue-greens, teals, forest green, jungle green... and I mix them - or the Cerulean blue with a yellow for a great bunch of green variants. Only neon pink works for pink, and added to Cerulean blue, makes lavender.

Liquid food colorings are not very effective when coloring soap and will tend to fade in storage. Liquid chlorophyll is supposed to be nice and also natural cosmetic colorants, such as those you can purchase from the *Pigment Lady*. I have not tried these yet. Certain spices can be used for coloring. Here are some other suggestions...you can use up to 1/2 teaspoon per pound of soap if you like, depending on desired shade. Mix the powder into a bit of the soap and the mix that back in to the rest of the batch. Here are the colors:

Cayenne Pepper	Salmon color
Cinnamon Powder	Beige
Paprika	Peach
Cocoa Powder	Coffee to Brown
Turmeric	Golden Yellow color
Cooking Chocolate Squares	Brown
Curry Powder	Yellow Peach
Liquid Chlorophyll	Light Green

Just remember with color in soap that it will look much darker and warmer when poured than after it sets. Think of how fat changes from gold to white and you can guess how your color can change in appearance and lighten up (and sometimes change shade). If you hit on something you like...WRITE IT DOWN! :-)

Here's some more inspiration on using natural substances for coloring from the *Latherings Soap Forum*.

From Rachael: "I have good luck with yellows, golds, tans, browns, oranges, greens, yellow-greens, pinks, salmons, greys and whites. I have no luck with natural purples, or blues. The powders can be mixed into the raw soap, into the lye water when hot, infused into the oils and strained, or mixed into a portion of the raw soap, and swirled into the rest of the soap, for designs. They vary from leaving pinpoint color dots throughout the whole block of soap, to simply staining the whole block of soap, to dramatic swirls and can look awesome. Start with a teaspoon to a pound of fats, alot of them are mixed to achieve a certain range of color. The reds-pinks-reddish tans-salmons are cinnamon, paprika, some ground rose petals(some go brown), pink clays. The yellows-golds-to tans are milk soaps (nonfat milk instead of water), turmeric, calendula, peanut oil soap, olive oil soap, beta carotene in tiny amounts. The tans-browns slippery elm(which I love because it smells sweet and agreeable), cocoa powder (which will have a dirty lather, but an awesome color, and cocoa butter soap just aches to have cocoa added to it), alot of the ground roses and dried flowers turn brown, cloves. The greens are baby food spinach (strained) gives a clear celery green, chlorophyll from grass clippings, seaweed, sage, green clays. The white is titanium dioxide, its all natural, just doesn't sound like it. Orange is baby food (pureed) carrots, beta carotene in small amounts, milk soap in high temp. range, (with whole fat, not non-fat, cows milk)."

From Sandy: " I ordered some purple soap colour from cranberrylane.com out of Coquitlam, B.C. I got the ground rattan jot which is from an East Indian herb (I think), and a liquid form called "passion for purple" which is probably made by infusing oils with the ground rattan jot. I think I'll try making some of that myself. Anyway, I use 1 T. of liquid and 1/8 tsp. of ground in a 1 lb. batch. It gives a pale purple with purple speckles. Then I add passionflower FO and call it purple passion. Hope this is helpful. "

From Cindy: "I use alkanet root for purple, it will go from rosy purple to blue-purple depending on the ph of your mixture. You soak your main oil in it, I add one cup alkanet root to two cups olive oil, heat gently for a minute, then let sit for a few hours, then strain and incorporate in total weight of olive oil before adding lye. It will look bright red until the lye hits it! "

A Note about Benzoin: I have had people ask about using benzoin in their soap. Apparently there's a popular soapmaking book out there that lists it as an ingredient. *Mother Earth Herbs* (they also supply it) describe benzoin in their ingredients list this way: BENZOIN - gum/resin comes from styrax benzoin in Sumatra - used as preservative in soaps and lotions using fresh fruit or vegetable ingredients (use 2 tsp. powder per pound of soap) - also acts as fixative in holding fragrance.

In another forum, I came across a reference to this:

Posted by Jan G. on July 27, 1998 at 10:32:24:

In Reply to: Benzoin posted by Anita on July 22, 1998 at 12:39:24:

"I ordered benzoin from *Soap Crafters Co.* They have a website, because that is how I found them - doing a search for benzoin. Soap Crafters is located in Salt Lake City. The benzoin is powdered - taupe colored. I ordered it because it was listed as an ingredient in a remilled soap recipe. Since then, I've failed to find it listed as a necessary ingredient in any other recipes. The stuff is expensive and I have not used it as yet. Apparently, the author of the book I have which lists it in remilled recipes believes that it preserves certain organic add-ins to remilled soap, i.e. cucumber pulp, etc."

I have not used benzoin yet, but have purchased some of the powder. Some people think the powder leaves a scratchy texture to the soap. Blending it into the oils when melting them might help, but I'm not sure if it takes care of the problem. There is a liquid form called "Tincture of Benzoin" and it can be found in the drugstore or pharmacy near the merthiolate and oils (like peppermint, eucalyptus, etc.). I've steered people away from it because it contains alcohol, but I've just noticed that Melinda Coss recommends it for her recipes in *The Handmade Soap Book*. Maybe in such small quantities the alcohol will not cause problems. It is used in the same proportions as the powder. If you have used the tincture and have experience with this, email me and let me know how it worked for you. In reading on soaplists I have gathered that some people think the powdered benzoin is scratchy in CP soap. Apparently the liquid benzoin has some color or darkens the soap, so keep that in mind if you are going to try using it...probably better for soaps that are already earthy colored or darker colored (like vanilla).

Stearic Acid: Most of the folks who sell supplies and are listed in the supplies section on the links page will also have Stearic Acid. It is often used in making other cosmetics and toiletries, like creams and lotions. You don't have to put it into your soap, but if you use it, it can help to make soap harder...especially nice when making some all-vegetable recipes. The rule of thumb is to use 1/8 oz. per pound of fat in the soap recipe. It is melted in with the fats.

Some tips on inexpensive soap molds: "My sister gave me her Jello Jiggler molds to use for soap and they turned out very cute. Little cars, football helmets, hearts, etc. These can be purchased at the grocery store, by the Jello , or specially ordered. Sure beats paying \$4.99 per mold at the candle store. Also, save the containers from Pringles potato chips or refrigerated cookie dough and use as disposable soap molds. Peel or cut the cardboard away after the 24 hour setup time and then cut soap into 1 inch wide circles. " -Cindy Bennight

" Have you ever tried using 1 litre milk cartons (1 quart?)? They come off easily, and the soap can be cut up into nice square bars." -Marleen Caswell

"I found snap-together drawer organizers at Target for \$1.99 each. They measure 3 x 2 x 9...and are the perfect shape for bars I think. (I've been having trouble cutting my bars consistently so I was looking for a bar shaped mold.) We'll see." - Michelle :)

Here's a great tip on using ABS pipe for molds, taken from the Latherings Soap Forum and posted by Glenda:

" Just a comment on plastic pipe...I bought 3" black ABS pipe- commonly used for sewers, bought a 2 foot section, used a saw to cut off the top to it resembles a large letter C. Used plastic food wrap and masking tape to cover the ends and poured in my soap (greased mold with Vaseline-petroleum jelly). I use to heavy cans or bottles on either side to keep it steady while the soaps solidify. Have a nice sized bar when cut 1" through. I also bought a couple of 1 foot sections and intend to add the end caps as were previously discussed, stand upright on the cap and end up with a round bar. Have not done that as yet. What I really wanted to say, is that the petroleum jelly is an inexpensive way to grease your molds, any type, especially if you buy the store brand, not Vaseline."

You can get real creative in the molds department. People have recommended Hershey's cocoa containers, all manner of PVC pipes, plastic downspouts with fluted corners, etc. Another alternative to Pringles cans that makes larger soaps is the container in which you buy badminton shuttlecocks ("birdies"). I suppose tennis balls might yield a similar container, but I haven't bought any for a long time. Another packaging material that is supposed to make durable molds and beautiful soaps is the one you get with *Sheba* Cat Food. If you are laughing, it's because you haven't been hopelessly smitten with the soapmaking addiction yet! Once that happens, you will eye any type of plastic material with soap molds in mind! Anyway...if you want to use them as molds, the milder flavored foods, like chicken, etc. are better (for getting out the smell). You can wash a bunch of them in your clothes washer and use a little bleach in the soapy water to clean them thoroughly (they are very durable and flexible plastic). When you use them as molds, carefully grease each one lightly with Vaseline petroleum jelly first. Supposed to make a beautiful bar! Think I'll look at these next time I go shopping since I've never bought the stuff...our cats are not very pampered and have access to loads of mice in the pastures.

A note about plastics used in conjunction with soapmaking: I have had a problem in the past with a certain set of molds I'd ordered and used for soapmaking. The soap would look fine, but after curing for a few days, it would become discolored and yellowish on the outside (and whatever color it was supposed to be, would almost seem to be leached out). I finally quit using those particular molds. Someone else just reported a similar incident when using a plastic sheet other than food grade to line her litter pan. If you use some sort of plastic other than food grade, you could have this problem. I don't know what chemical the plastic is imbued with, but it seems to have a reaction with the soap during the curing process...UGLY!