

THE COMPLETE

Soap Making Handbook

From your first batch to advanced swirl designs — everything you need to make beautiful soap at home.

Part of The Complete Home Craft Starter Bundle | Updated Edition

Chapter 1: Why Make Your Own Soap?

The Case for Handmade Soap

Store-bought soap is often detergent in disguise — full of sulfates, synthetic fragrances, and preservatives that strip your skin. Handmade cold-process soap retains natural glycerin (a humectant your skin loves) and lets you control every ingredient. Once you make your first batch, you'll never look at a \$12 artisan bar the same way again.

- Control every ingredient — no mystery chemicals
- Natural glycerin stays in the bar (removed commercially)
- Customize scent, color, and skin benefits
- Cost: ~\$1.50–\$2.50 per bar vs. \$8–15 retail
- Makes excellent gifts — perceived value is enormous

◆ PRO TIP

Your first batch will be imperfect. That's part of the process. By batch three, you'll be giving bars as gifts and wondering why you ever bought soap.

Chapter 2: Safety First

Working with Lye (Sodium Hydroxide)

Lye (NaOH) is essential for saponification — the chemical reaction that turns oils into soap. It is caustic and must be handled with respect. Many beginners fear lye unnecessarily; millions of people use it safely at home every day.

- Always wear safety goggles and rubber gloves
- Work in a well-ventilated area — lye fumes are brief but strong
- Always add lye TO water, never water to lye (prevents violent reaction)
- Keep children and pets out of the workspace during mixing
- Use dedicated soap-making equipment — never cook food in it again
- Lye + aluminum = dangerous reaction. Use stainless steel or HDPE plastic

◆ **PRO TIP**

Finished soap is pH-neutral and completely safe to use. The lye is 100% consumed during saponification — there is none left in your bar.

If Lye Contacts Your Skin — Correct First Aid

Follow these steps carefully. Modern safety guidelines recommend a specific approach that differs from older advice.

- IMMEDIATELY flush with large amounts of cool running water for at least 15–20 minutes
- Remove contaminated clothing while flushing with water
- Do NOT use vinegar on skin — vinegar can cause a neutralisation reaction that generates heat and may worsen the burn
- Do NOT use acidic solutions of any kind on lye burns to the skin
- After thorough water flushing, seek medical attention if irritation persists
- Vinegar IS appropriate for cleaning contaminated work surfaces and equipment (not skin)

Chapter 3: Equipment You Need

Essential Tools

You likely own most of this already. The investment for a full soap-making setup is around \$40–70 and lasts for years.

- Digital kitchen scale (accurate to 0.1g) — weight is everything in soap
- Stick (immersion) blender — speeds trace dramatically
- 2 large stainless steel or HDPE pitchers (one for lye water, one for oils)
- Silicone spatulas (x2) — flexible, easy to clean
- Soap mold — a silicone loaf mold (\$15) or lined wooden box
- Thermometer — infrared or probe style
- Safety gear: goggles, rubber gloves
- Newspaper or plastic sheeting to protect surfaces

◆ **PRO TIP**

Don't use aluminum, cast iron, or tin. Lye reacts with these metals. Stainless steel, HDPE plastic, and silicone are your friends.

Chapter 4: Your First Recipe — Classic Beginner Bar

Cold Process Soap: Simple Olive & Coconut Bar

This is the recipe we recommend for every beginner. It produces a hard, long-lasting bar with a creamy lather. The two-oil formula is forgiving and predictable.

- Olive Oil: 300g (conditioning, gentle)
- Coconut Oil: 200g (hardness, bubbly lather)
- Distilled Water: 185g
- Sodium Hydroxide (Lye): 68g
- Optional: 15–20ml fragrance or essential oil (added at trace)

Step-by-Step Instructions

Read through all steps before you begin. Prepare your workspace. Put on your safety gear before touching lye.

- Step 1 — Prep: Line your mold. Lay out all equipment. Put on gloves and goggles.
- Step 2 — Lye water: Weigh 185g distilled water into a heat-safe pitcher. In a separate container, weigh 68g lye. Slowly pour lye INTO water while stirring. It will heat to ~80°C — set aside to cool.
- Step 3 — Melt oils: Gently melt coconut oil. Combine with olive oil in your main pot. Allow to cool to ~40–45°C.
- Step 4 — Check temperatures: Both lye water and oils should be 35–45°C and within 10° of each other.
- Step 5 — Combine: Pour lye water into oils slowly while stick blending in short pulses.
- Step 6 — Trace: Blend until you reach 'trace' — the mixture thickens to a light pudding consistency. A drizzle on the surface holds for a moment.
- Step 7 — Add fragrance: Stir in your essential oils at light trace.

- Step 8 — Pour & insulate: Pour into mold. Tap to remove air bubbles. Cover with cardboard and wrap in a towel for 24–48 hours.
- Step 9 — Unmold & cut: After 48 hours, unmold. Cut into bars. Place on a rack.
- Step 10 — Cure: Allow bars to cure in a cool, airy space for 4–6 weeks. Patience equals quality.

◆ **PRO TIP**

Soap goes through 'gel phase' in the mold — the center may look translucent and warm. This is normal and actually produces a harder, more vibrant bar.

Chapter 5: Oils & Their Properties

Your Oil Library

Every oil brings different qualities. Once you understand the basics, you can design your own recipes from scratch.

- Coconut Oil — Hardness, big bubbles, cleansing (limit to 30% or can be drying)
- Palm Oil — Hardness, stable lather (consider sustainable sourcing)
- Olive Oil — Conditioning, creamy lather, good for sensitive skin
- Castor Oil — Boost lather, adds shine (use 5–10% max)
- Sweet Almond Oil — Skin-softening, light feel
- Shea Butter — Moisturizing, adds creaminess
- Avocado Oil — Rich, great for dry/mature skin
- Sunflower Oil — Lightweight conditioning

◆ **PRO TIP**

Use a soap calculator (SoapCalc.net or Brambleberry's lye calculator) whenever you change a recipe. The lye amount must be recalculated for every oil change.

Chapter 6: Colorants & Fragrance

Natural Colorants

Synthetic micas give the most vivid, reliable color. Natural options offer earthy tones and added skin benefits.

- Mica powder — Widest color range, cosmetic-grade, stable in soap
- Activated charcoal — Deep black, detoxifying properties
- Turmeric — Golden yellow (fades slightly over time)
- Spirulina — Green tones, antioxidant
- Madder root — Pink to rose shades
- Indigo powder — Blues and purples
- Cocoa powder — Brown tones, faint chocolate scent

Essential Oils vs. Fragrance Oils

Both work in cold process soap. Here's what you need to know:

- Essential oils: Natural, therapeutic, but some (citrus) fade quickly in soap
- Fragrance oils: Stronger, more stable scent, wider variety — check 'soap safe' rating
- Lavender EO: Excellent in soap, calming, good skin benefits
- Peppermint EO: Invigorating, stable, popular
- Lemongrass EO: Strong and lasting — better than straight lemon
- Vanilla FO: Turns soap brown — expected and often desirable

◆ PRO TIP

Use approximately 3% fragrance by total oil weight. For 500g oils: 15g fragrance.

Chapter 7: Troubleshooting

Common Problems & Solutions

Every soap maker hits these. Don't throw the batch away.

- Soap too soft after 48h: Give it more time. Low coconut oil or high water can slow hardening.

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Candle Making Masterclass

Wax types, wick sizing, fragrance loading, and pro troubleshooting — everything you need to make candles that actually perform.

Part of The Complete Home Craft Starter Bundle

Chapter 1: The Candle Making Opportunity

Why Candles Are the Perfect Home Business

The global candle market exceeds \$10 billion annually. Consumers are increasingly paying premium prices for small-batch, artisan candles. A candle that costs \$4–6 to make routinely sells for \$22–35. The margins are exceptional, the product is giftable year-round, and the craft is genuinely satisfying.

- Materials cost: \$4–7 per candle (wax, wick, fragrance, container)
- Retail price: \$18–35 per candle
- Profit margin: 300–500%
- Etsy, farmers markets, Instagram: proven channels
- Seasonal demand spikes: holidays, Valentine's, Mother's Day

◆ PRO TIP

Start with one signature scent and one vessel. Perfecting one candle is worth more than making 20 mediocre ones.

Chapter 2: Wax Types — Choosing Yours

The Four Main Waxes

Wax choice affects scent throw, appearance, burn time, and price. There's no universally 'best' wax — only the best wax for your goals.

- Soy Wax (container): Clean-burning, sustainable, excellent hot throw, slight frosting is normal. Best for beginners. Popular with eco-conscious buyers.
- Paraffin Wax: Strongest scent throw, widest range of forms. Traditional. Less eco-friendly perception. Still the industry standard.
- Coconut Wax: Premium feel, excellent scent throw, slow burn. Most expensive. Great for luxury positioning.
- Beeswax: Natural, air-purifying reputation, subtle honey scent. Expensive. Specialty market.

◆ PRO TIP

For beginners: start with a quality soy wax (Golden Brands 464 or 444). It's affordable, consistent, and has a loyal customer base.

Chapter 3: Fragrance & Scent Throw

The Science of Scent Throw

Scent throw refers to how far a candle's fragrance carries. 'Cold throw' is the unlit scent; 'hot throw' is while burning. Both matter. Hot throw is primarily determined by fragrance load percentage and fragrance quality.

- Fragrance load: 6–10% by weight of wax (start at 6%, test up)
- For 200g candle: 12–20g fragrance oil
- Add fragrance at the correct temperature (typically 55–65°C for soy)
- Stir slowly for 2 full minutes after adding fragrance
- Use fragrance oils rated for candles (not all FOs are heat-safe)
- Flash point: fragrance flash point must be above your pour temp

◆ **PRO TIP**

Adding more fragrance oil doesn't always mean stronger throw. Over-fragrance causes seeping, poor adhesion, and fire risk. Test at 6%, 8%, and 10% to find your sweet spot.

Top Performing Fragrance Families

These fragrance categories consistently sell well and have proven hot throw in soy wax:

- Warm & Cozy: Vanilla, sandalwood, amber, cinnamon — universal appeal
- Fresh & Clean: Cotton, linen, sea salt, rain — year-round sellers
- Floral: Lavender, jasmine, rose — spa positioning, female-skewing
- Seasonal: Pumpkin spice, pine, mulled cider — massive holiday demand
- Citrus: Grapefruit, lemon verbena — energizing, brightening
- Woody: Cedar, teakwood, tobacco — male-friendly, premium feel

Chapter 4: Wick Selection — The Most Critical Variable

Why Wicks Make or Break Your Candle

Wick size determines melt pool, mushrooming, soot, burn time, and scent throw. An undersized wick tunnels. An oversized wick overheats, soots, and is a fire risk. Wick sizing requires testing — there's no shortcut.

- Cotton wicks: Standard, widely available, good for soy and paraffin
- Wood wicks: Crackling sound, visual interest, great for premium branding
- Eco wicks: Braided cotton, minimal mushrooming, popular for soy
- CD series: Stiff, self-trimming, minimal curling — professional choice

Wick Testing Protocol

This is non-negotiable if you want to sell. Never skip wick testing.

- Test 3 wick sizes per container/wax/fragrance combo
- Burn for 4 hours — check melt pool (should reach edges in 4h)
- Let cool completely, note mushrooming and soot
- Repeat 3 burns minimum before finalizing
- Document: wick type, size, container diameter, wax, fragrance %
- A proper melt pool = full diameter, 0.5–1cm deep

◆ PRO TIP

Wick it right, and everything else follows. Wick it wrong, and no amount of beautiful fragrance or packaging saves you.

Chapter 5: The Basic Candle Recipe

Beginner Soy Container Candle

This recipe makes two 8oz (227g) jar candles. Use a kitchen scale for accuracy.

- Soy wax (Golden 464 or similar): 400g
- Fragrance oil (candle-safe): 28g (~7%)
- Pre-tabbed cotton wicks (sized for 8cm diameter jar)
- Two 8oz mason jars or glass containers
- Wick stickers or hot glue to center wicks

Step-by-Step Process

Preparation is 80% of the result. Set up everything before melting any wax.

- Step 1 — Prep jars: Stick wick tabs to the bottom center of each jar. Use a wick bar or pencil to keep wicks centered and straight.
- Step 2 — Melt wax: Melt wax in a double boiler or dedicated pour pot. Heat to 75–80°C.
- Step 3 — Monitor temp: Remove from heat. Let cool to 60–65°C before adding fragrance.
- Step 4 — Add fragrance: Pour 28g fragrance into wax. Stir slowly and continuously for 2 minutes.
- Step 5 — Pour: Pour into jars at 55–60°C. Leave 1cm headspace. Pour slowly to avoid bubbles.
- Step 6 — Cool: Let candles cool undisturbed at room temperature. Avoid drafts. Do not refrigerate.
- Step 7 — Second pour: Soy wax sinks as it cools. Top off sinkholes with a small amount of remelted wax.
- Step 8 — Cure: Allow 48–72 hours minimum cure time before burning. 1–2 weeks for optimal scent throw.
- Step 9 — Trim wick: Trim to 6mm before first burn. Include this instruction with your candles.

◆ PRO TIP

The single most common beginner mistake: pouring too hot. If your wax is above 65°C when you add fragrance, volatile top notes evaporate before the candle is even made. Patience at this step pays dividends.

Chapter 6: Appearance & Finishing

Achieving a Professional Look

The difference between a homemade candle and a boutique candle is 90% about consistency and presentation.

- Smooth tops: Pour at the right temp (55–60°C for soy) and avoid drafts
- Frosting: A natural characteristic of soy — not a defect. Customers appreciate authenticity.
- Adhesion issues (wet spots): Candle pulling away from glass — cosmetic only. Reduce pour temp slightly.
- Labels: Kraft labels with a clean font. Include: scent name, burn time, wick trim reminder, net weight.
- Lids: Wooden lids elevate perceived value significantly. Available cheaply in bulk.
- Vessels: Mason jars are classic. Amber pharmacy jars = premium. Tin containers = travel/gifting angle.

◆ PRO TIP

Photograph candles with natural light, a wooden surface, and complementary props (dried flowers, linen cloth). These three elements create 90% of the premium feel in product photography.

Chapter 7: Candle Safety & Labeling Requirements

Selling Candles Legally

If you sell candles, there are labeling requirements and safety standards to follow. This section covers the essentials for US and UK markets.

- Warning label required: 'Keep away from flammable materials. Keep out of reach of children and pets. Never leave burning candle unattended. Place on heat-resistant surface.'
- Net weight must appear on label
- Fragrance allergens disclosure required in UK/EU (IFRA compliance)
- Burn time testing: Accurate claims required
- ASTM F2179 (US): Candle safety standard — your candle should comply
- Home insurance: Check your policy if selling from home

THE COMPLETE

Resin Art Beginner's Guide

From your first pour to selling finished pieces — everything you need to create stunning resin art at home.

Part of The Complete Home Craft Starter Bundle | Updated Edition

Chapter 1: Why Resin Art?

The Most Versatile Craft Medium

Epoxy resin has transformed the craft world in the last decade. It can be poured into molds, used to coat surfaces, cast into jewelry, embedded with flowers or glitter, and used to create ocean-effect artwork that sells for hundreds of dollars.

- Creates glassy, professional-looking results quickly
- Works on canvas, wood, coasters, jewelry, trays, and more
- Embedded objects (botanicals, glitter, photos) create unique pieces
- Sellable products: wall art, coasters, jewelry, keychains, trays
- Material cost for a set of 4 coasters: ~\$4–8. Retail price: \$30–50

◆ PRO TIP

Resin art photos stop the scroll. If you make anything beautiful, post it.

Chapter 2: Types of Resin

Which Resin to Use

Not all resins are the same. Beginners should start with an easy-pour epoxy resin rated for art applications.

- Art Epoxy Resin: 1:1 or 2:1 mix ratio, 20–45 min working time, crystal clear cure. Best for beginners.
- UV Resin: Cures in 1–3 minutes under UV light. Small projects only.
- Casting Resin: Low viscosity, for deep pours and molds. Longer cure time.
- Polyurethane Resin: Very fast set (5–20 min). Opaque results.

◆ PRO TIP

Start with a quality art epoxy with a 1:1 ratio. The math is simple and error rate is low.

Chapter 3: Safety & Workspace Setup

Protecting Yourself

Uncured epoxy resin is a sensitizer — repeated skin contact without protection can cause allergic reactions that worsen over time.

- Nitrile gloves (not latex): Wear at all times when handling uncured resin
- Safety glasses: Protect eyes from splashes
- Respirator (P100 or N95 at minimum): Important during mixing
- Ventilation: Work near an open window or with a fan exhausting outward
- Dedicated workspace: Resin drips ruin floors and furniture permanently
- Never pour uncured resin down the drain — cure it first, then dispose

◆ PRO TIP

Once resin is fully cured, it is completely inert and safe. The precautions are for the liquid state only.

Chapter 4: Equipment & Supplies

Your Starter Kit

You can start resin art for under \$60 total.

- ESSENTIAL — Epoxy resin kit (art grade, includes hardener)
- ESSENTIAL — Digital kitchen scale (resin is measured by WEIGHT, not volume — see Chapter 5)
- ESSENTIAL — Mixing cups (graduated, ideally silicone for easy cleanup)
- ESSENTIAL — Silicone mixing sticks or wooden stir sticks
- ESSENTIAL — Heat gun or butane torch (removes bubbles)
- ESSENTIAL — Nitrile gloves and eye protection
- ESSENTIAL — Silicone molds OR wooden canvas/substrate
- NICE — Alcohol inks, mica powder, dried flowers, glitter

◆ PRO TIP

Buy a starter pack that includes resin + molds + basic colorants. More economical and gets you pouring faster.

Chapter 5: Mixing Ratios — Read This Carefully

Weight vs Volume — A Critical Distinction

This is the most important technical section in this guide. Getting your mix ratio wrong is the #1 cause of resin that won't cure, stays sticky, or remains soft. Please read this carefully.

- Every resin brand specifies either a WEIGHT ratio or a VOLUME ratio — these are different
- Always check your specific brand's instructions before mixing
- A 1:1 ratio by VOLUME is NOT the same as 1:1 by WEIGHT (resins have different densities)
- ArtResin: 1:1 by volume
- TotalBoat: 2:1 by volume (2 parts resin : 1 part hardener)
- Pro Marine: 2:1 by volume
- Most art resins: 1:1 by volume
- When in doubt: use the measuring cups provided by your brand, not a scale

How to Measure Correctly

Follow this protocol every time to avoid wasted batches.

- Step 1: Read your brand's instructions — find the mix ratio (e.g., 1:1, 2:1) AND whether it is by WEIGHT or VOLUME
- Step 2: For VOLUME ratios — use graduated cups. Fill Part A to the required line, then Part B to its line
- Step 3: For WEIGHT ratios — use a digital scale. Zero out the scale between each component
- Step 4: Combine into a clean third cup. Stir slowly for 3–4 minutes, scraping sides and bottom
- Step 5: Transfer to a second clean cup and stir for 1 more minute. This removes unmixed resin from cup walls
- Step 6: Rest 5 minutes before adding color or pouring

◆ **PRO TIP**

Sticky or soft resin after 24 hours is almost always a mixing ratio error. The fix is to get a new batch and mix more carefully — there is no reliable way to fix uncured resin once it's been poured.

Chapter 6: Your First Pour — Resin Coasters

Project: Set of 4 Round Coasters

Coasters are the perfect first resin project. Functional, giftable, fast to make, and sell extremely well.

- Round silicone coaster molds (3.5–4 inch)
- Art epoxy resin: check your brand's ratio (see Chapter 5)
- Alcohol inks or mica powder in 2–3 colors
- Heat gun, mixing cups and stir sticks

Step-by-Step Instructions

Temperature matters. Resin works best at 21–24°C. Warm your bottles in warm (not hot) water for 5 minutes if cold.

- Step 1 — Prep: Lay silicone molds on a level surface. Cover work area. Put on gloves.
- Step 2 — Measure: Follow your brand's ratio exactly (see Chapter 5). Combine in a clean cup.
- Step 3 — Mix: Stir slowly and thoroughly for 3–4 minutes. Scrape sides and bottom.
- Step 4 — Rest: Let mixed resin sit 5 minutes to allow large bubbles to surface.
- Step 5 — Add color: Divide into smaller cups. Add 1–3 drops alcohol ink per cup. Stir gently.
- Step 6 — Pour: Pour colors into mold in layers, swirls, or in sequence.
- Step 7 — Manipulate: Use a stir stick to swirl. Tilt the mold.
- Step 8 — Torch: Pass heat gun or torch quickly over surface. Bubbles pop and colors spread.
- Step 9 — Cover & cure: Tent cardboard over molds. Cure 24 hours minimum.
- Step 10 — Demold & finish: Pop from molds. Sand edges if needed. Apply felt pads.

◆ **PRO TIP**

Every pour looks different even with the same colors. 'One of a kind' is not just marketing copy — it's literally true.

Chapter 7: Color Techniques

Creating Stunning Effects

These are the techniques that turn beginner pours into scroll-stopping art.

- Ocean pour: Blues, teals, and white in a wave pattern. Most popular resin art style.
- Dirty pour: Pre-mix colors in layers in one cup, then pour in one motion.
- Swipe technique: Pour base color, add accent colors, swipe across with a palette knife.
- Geode style: Build up layers with crushed glass, mica, and metallic paint.
- Cell technique: Add a drop of silicone oil to each color cup. Cells form when you torch.
- Lacing: Very thin lines of contrasting color dragged through wet resin with a toothpick.

◆ **PRO TIP**

Save your reference photos before you pour. The pattern looks very different when wet versus cured.

Chapter 8: Products You Can Make & Sell

Turning Resin Into Revenue

The range of sellable resin products is enormous.

- Coasters (sets of 4): Most popular item. Price: \$30–50/set.
- Serving trays: High perceived value. Price: \$55–90.
- Earrings & jewelry: Small molds, fast to make. Price: \$15–30/pair.
- Keychains: Great market. Price: \$8–15.
- Wall art (canvas or wood panel): Highest price point. \$80–300+.