

Soap Facts and History

(Compiled by SoapyLisa)

Data on soap making from a few web sites.

While the origin of soap is not well documented, it appears to have been available to the early civilizations of the Fertile Crescent after 2000 B.C. During this epoch soap was used as a wound medication or hair dressing because the cleansing properties had not yet been discovered.

Even the well chronicled baths of Queen Cleopatra were absent of soap. Essential oils were used for her bathing rituals. Cleopatra used fine white sand as an abrasive agent for cleansing.

The grand baths of early ancient Rome employed cosmetics, essences, and oils but no soap. Later some Romans understood the cleansing properties of soap, but its use was not widespread.

Arabs in the Arabian Desert and later the Turks were the first societies to recognize the value of Soap. When the Turks invaded the Byzantine Empire, soap was introduced to Europe.

However, isolated tribes of Vikings and Celts discovered soap independently. The Celts are even credited with introducing soap to England around 1000 A.D.

It is not until the 13th century that the history of soap making becomes more concrete. Marseilles emerged as the first great center of soap making and remained an important producer through the Middle Ages. Genoa, Venice, and Bari in Italy came to rival it, as did Castila in Spain. Each of these regions had a plentiful supply of olive oil and barilla (a fleshy plant whose ashes were used to make lye). This formulation became the standard through the 17th century.

In the early 18th century, a number of poor olive harvests induced soap makers to investigate the use of other oils rather than olive. Parallel advances in steam navigation improved the access to oils from far away ports. These changes resulted in a modification of the basic soap formulation from olive oils to a carefully selected blend of fats and oils.

Though a fair amount of soap was being produced, it was most often used for laundering. It is worth mentioning that until the 18th century people did not consider cleanliness a positive virtue and bathing a social norm.

In the 18th century bathing came into vogue as a medical or restorative treatment. Water was considered a magical fluid which if correctly applied could be beneficial for

all manner of infestation. As more doctors prescribed the water cure, the idea of bathing slowly became acceptable. At the same time non-medical bathing became increasingly popular in Europe.

Advances in plumbing, including running water and bathtubs which could be drained, took soap over its last hurdle for mass acceptance. Soap manufacturing thrived in Europe and England.

As soap was not here when they arrived, early settlers were required to make it themselves. Making soap as far as the settlers were concerned was women's business.

The women stored cooking grease and animal fat all year long for soap making day, a yearly event that preceded Spring cleaning.

Ashes from the fireplaces were also stored to make lye. Rainwater was trickled through the ashes to leach out the lye contained in the potassium salts of the burned wood. A fresh egg was used to determine whether the lye was of proper strength. If it sank slowly, all was well. If it floated, the lye was thought to be too strong, and would have to be diluted; if it dropped, the lye was too weak, and would be run through the "ash hopper" again or boiled down.

Solid fats would have to be rendered, and then all fats boiled and skimmed to rid it of extraneous hair, dirt, spices, and other debris. Then it would be strained through a fine cloth. The lye was then stirred into the fats. If the mixture formed a thick ingredient the project was successful. If it separated, they tried again. This process would take most of the day to complete.

Over 150 years passed before some enterprising persons decided to produce soap for mass distribution and consumption. These early soap entrepreneurs appeared in the mid 18th century. They made rounds of local households, purchased their stored fat, and sold the soap back to housewives. They were called Tallow Chandlers and Soap Boilers.

The soap was first peddled door to door. Eventually it was distributed in general stores, where it was sold from enormous blocks. Customers would indicate how much they wanted and the amount would be cut off and wrapped for carrying home.

In 1806 William Colgate opened up a soap making concern in New York called Colgate & Company which was to become the first great soap making concern in this Country. It was not until the 1830's that the company began selling individual bars in uniform weights. In 1872 Colgate introduced Cashmere Bouquet, a perfumed soap.

At the same period that Colgate & Co. introduced Cashmere Bouquet, a perfumed soap, William Procter and James Gamble set up business together in Cincinnati. The two sold candles and soap house to house from a wheel barrow. Within a few years Procter and Gamble became a large manufacturer and distributed large quantities of

products to major cities along the Ohio river, including Pittsburgh, Memphis, and Louisville. In 1879, Procter and Gamble introduced ivory soap to the marketplace.

In the Western United States, the B.J. Johnson Company was making a soap entirely of palm and olive oil. The soap was popular enough to rename their company after it - Palmolive. It should be mentioned that today's Palmolive soap is not the same as the original.

In the Midwest, a Kansas based soap manufacturer known as the Peet Brothers merged with Palmolive to become Palmolive-Peet. In 1928, Palmolive-Peet joined the Colgate Company to create the Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company. (In 1953 Peet was dropped from the title, leaving us with Colgate-Palmolive.)

Meanwhile, Lever Brothers, an English firm, sent over some of their staff to get things started in the United States. The company introduced Lifebuoy Soap in 1895.

The establishment of these major players transformed soap into a multibillion-dollar industry. Each of these companies were very competitive and determined to make their product the market leader. Advertising in the form of promotions and print advertisements was the primary communication tool used to sell soap at this time.

This intense competition led to the introduction of laundry detergents in the early 1900s and aggressive radio and television advertising later.

HISTORY OF SOAP: The first literary reference to soap as a means of cleansing was by the Greek physician Galen in the second century A.D. By 1700, there were 63 soap companies in London England, even though soap was still more of a curiosity than a household item. This changed with the medical discovery of bacteria and the concern that cleanliness could be a means of eliminating disease-producing germs.

Soap was introduced into America by Europeans but was hard to come by for the early settlers. Then with the addition of livestock to the homestead, soap making became a part of life. When animals were slaughtered, their fat was stripped off and rendered into tallow. The tallow was boiled with lye-water, which was leached from the winter's ashes. This soap was used for washing clothes and floors and for the occasional bath.

There was no printed recipe for soap making at this time. A soap maker had to judge the strength and quality of the lye and its reactions. In 1832, the French chemist Eugene-Michel Chevreul demystified soap by showing that saponification was a chemical process splitting fat and lye into soap and glycerin. Soon it was discovered that adding palm kernel oil produced a soap that lathered more easily. Soap started to be wrapped and named to give it product distinction, and aggressive marketing and advertising began.

By 1890 innumerable variations of soap were offered, with the five major companies being, Colgate, Morse Taylor, Albert, Pears, and Bailey. Perfumes were added. A bar of

Colgate's Cashmere Bouquet cost 25 cents, rather costly when a quart of milk was 5 cents. In 1933 Procter and Gamble introduced the first household synthetic detergent, and in 1947, Tide, the first non-soap heavy-duty laundry product hit the shelves.

Now in the 21st century, a person will find that most soap bars in the grocery store are actually synthetic detergents. The average person's morning hygienic routine-including shaving; showering; applying cologne, deodorant, make-up, or lotion-puts him or her into contact with over 100 chemicals before breakfast. This is a sobering thought! Fortunately there has been a revival of soap making the old fashioned way. Here at Denali Dreams we offer you a pure natural soap, that not only looks and smells good, but is good for your skin as well.

Types of soap

All-in -- This is where all the raw materials are placed in a pan and everything goes in to the finished soap. This means that because glycerin is a by-product of the soap making process, any all-in soap will have a small glycerin content of about 2-4%.

Fully boiled soap -- In this case the glycerin is removed by adding a brine solution (salt water) to the soap. The glycerin dissolves in the water and is drained off leaving only the soap which is then dried into little flakes or ``noodles".

Cold process soap -- This is an all in soap, but there is no external heating as all the heat comes from the saponification reaction which is exothermic (i.e. an excess of heat is produced by the chemical changes in the components of the reaction. An example would be the dissolving of sodium hydroxide in water). These soaps are normally made with pure coconut oil.

The soaps produced are called hard or soft depending on what sort of fats and oils are used, and whether sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide is the alkali. Processing The soaps are then processed. If the soap was made into noodles, it is milled. If it was poured into a frame while hot it is cut.

During milling the soap chips are pushed through a machine called a plodder which mixes in color and perfume and produces a continuous extruded bar of soap. This is then cut into billets by machine.

With cut soap, the soap is cut by hand or machine from a large block down to a soap sized billet.

After the soap has been made into a billet, it is stamped. There are two kinds of die. One is a capacity die where excess soap squeezes out around the middle and cut off later. This method produces a very regular weight and size and is the way that most domestic soaps are made. The other kind is a box die (or collar die). This contains all the soap which was placed in the mold. This methods produces a less deformed (and therefore more transparent) tablet and also requires less finishing. Types of soap

production Opaque milled soap -- This group represents the vast majority of soap produced in the world today. These soaps are made using a fully boiled process and utilize some of the most advanced soap making techniques, usually on a very large scale. After manufacture the soaps are then milled as above.

Translucent soap -- This is a relatively modern technique which simulates the old frame method and can produce glycerin soaps which a reasonable level of glycerin (up to 4%). The benefit of this method is that it produces a glycerin soap using a large scale, automatic machine process, which is therefore more commercially attractive.

Transparent soap -- There are three ways to make transparent soaps. The first is to pour the whole making into a frame and cut up the soap from a large block. This is very labor intensive.

The second way is to pour the soap into individual tubes which produces long bars of soap which then can be processed automatically.

The third method is to pour soap into individual molds, which are then cooled, and the individual soaps released. This can be a completely automatic process.

The best method is the first, and the worst method is the last. Pouring into individual molds requires the soap to be very liquid and thus the water content is very high. This in turn means that the soap is prone to melting, even more than normal glycerin soaps. Glycerin is attractive to water and there is a tendency for such soaps to absorb moisture unless kept dry.

Synthetic detergent bars -- There are an increasing number of these cleansing bars on the market. They are made using a different chemical process to normal soap making. They were originally developed to attempt to achieve a product which is closer to pH neutral than normal soap. The first of these was Neutrogena, but there are no others available such as Dove.

*** soapyone's note: Lisa did a good job compiling this information, but, as a school teacher, she should have corrected the spelling errors. I think she needs her mouth washed out with soap! Hopefully her and Olivia will see this and Olivia will take appropriate action to correct the teacher's mistakes. ☺ It's just a thought.