

Candle Making During the American Revolutionary War

During the American Revolutionary period, candles served as essential lifeblood for illumination. Most everyday households made inexpensive tallow candles from rendered animal fats (beef or sheep suet), while the wealthy used expensive beeswax or clean-burning spermaceti whale oil. Production was a communal, seasonal chore usually done in autumn or winter.

Materials Used

- **Tallow:** Rendered from cow or sheep fat saved throughout the year; smoked, smelled poorly, and guttered quickly.
- **Beeswax:** Natural, sweet-smelling, and long-burning, but costly.
- **Spermaceti:** Extracted from sperm whale head matter; burned bright and clean, favored by the elite.
- **Bayberry:** A regional American plant wax boiled from bayberries; smelled pleasant and burned long, but tedious to harvest.
- **Wicking:** Loose twisted strands of un-braided cotton, hemp, or linen.