

# SOAPMAKING

## An Age-Old Craft



Most of us take soaps and shampoos for granted. They come in all sizes and shapes, colors and scents. All we have to do is go to the store, pick out what kind we want, and buy it.

It has not always been so simple. There were no stores to go to in Vermont's pioneer days. People had to make their own soap using fat they rendered from their meat, water they collected, and lye they made.

The process is not difficult but it does take some time. Try making your own soap using the recipe that Vicki Greenwood and Christine Thompson, two sixth graders from Derby Elementary, researched and wrote up.



When Vermont was first settled, women made soap for their families. Soap was made in a big cast-iron pot over a wood fire. Soapmaking then wasn't a pleasant job.

Christine and I visited Mrs. Rossier of Holland, Vermont, to watch her make soap. She had laid out the ingredients. The lye was in a package purchased in a grocery store. Lye used to be made by dripping rainwater through wood ashes. Mrs. Rossier also had water and fat or lard. If you want you can add natural or purchased scents to perfume your soap.

### Mrs. Rossier's Soap

#### Simple recipe for four bars

#### Ingredients

1. 4 cups of fat
2. 6 tbsp. and 2 tsp. of lye
3. 2 cups of rainwater

#### Tools

1. Two containers - not aluminum
2. Wooden spoon
3. Thermometer
4. Molds

Soapmaking isn't complicated. After the fat is melted it is cooled to about 110° F. Meanwhile, in another container, dissolve the lye in hot water and cool it to 85° F. Pour the lye and water mixture into the fat in a thin, steady stream. Keep stirring until it's as thick as honey. It should take about twenty to thirty minutes. Pour the mixture into molds or a glass pan. Cover the mixture and keep it warm for at least 24 hours. Soap should be removed from the molds and left to cure for two weeks in the open air before using it.

To make "floating soap" use a wooden spoon to beat air into the thick soap mixture just before molding.