

# Making lye soap is economical and fun

By CAROL MILLS  
Staff writer

For about 50 cents a bar, lye soap can be made at home — just like many grandmothers used to make it.

Tracy Kern of London, who has been making her own soap for several years, was at the Extension Service Wednesday morning to demonstrate the procedure to a group of interested pupils.

Cold Process Soap (CP Soap) is made by combining fats and lye (sodium hydroxide) together. The fat can be almost any type of oil, strictly olive oil, or a combination of different oils for different recipes.

Kern said making soap is not difficult, but it is a precise science. The right measurements of lye, water, and fats form a chemical reaction in which the sum of the ingredients “saponify” and become soap. The entire process takes about six weeks to complete because the bars have to rest for that length of time.

“I thought she was going to make old fashion lye soap the way grandma made it,” said Henry Lewis, who came to learn how to make soap. “I thought it had to be lard. There’s a lot more to it than I thought.”

Kern said the proper safety precautions are as important as the precise measuring of the ingredients. Goggles and gloves are required because lye can cause severe chemical burns if it comes in contact with skin.

### Steps to remember

Safety equipment is a must and each ingredient must be measured carefully. Always pour the lye into the water or pour the lye water mixture into the oils — always pour the lye. Most any type of oil can be used for fat, but it is important to use a well-tested recipe. To

experiment with recipes, use a lye calculator because different oils require different amounts of lye to saponify.

### Equipment

The utensils needed to make lye soap include a stainless steel or enamel pot, plastic spoons, scale, pitcher, thermometer, stick blender, newspaper, and soap mold. A lye calculator found at [www.soapcalc.net](http://www.soapcalc.net) can be used. Plug in how many ounces of each type of fat and the calculator will tell you how much distilled water and lye are needed.

Kern said fancy molds can be used to create soaps to be used as gifts. Oils, lye, and fragrances can be found at [www.brambleberry.com](http://www.brambleberry.com) or [www.camdengrey.com](http://www.camdengrey.com). Recommended reading materials are “The Soapmaker’s Companion” by Susan Miller Cavitch and “The Everything Soapmaking Book” by Alicia Grosso.

For more information, call Tina at the Extension Service 864-4167.

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### BASIC SOAP RECIPE

#### Ingredients:

- 15.22 ounces cold distilled water
- 172 grams lye
- 35.3 ounces olive oil
- 8.9 ounces coconut oil

#### Method:

Measure carefully and pour lye into distilled water. Stir carefully and let cool to 110 F. Meanwhile, combine oils and cool to 110 F. When the lye water and oils are the same temperature, pour the lye water into the oils and stir carefully until a trace is reached. (A trace is when an indentation can be made along the top of the mixture and it stays put.) Pour or ladle into molds and let set for 24 hours. Remove soap from the molds and cut into bars with a strong knife. Place on well ventilated racks and let rest for six weeks.



PHOTOS BY CAROL MILLS

Above, Tracy Kern ladles homemade lye soap, which looks like caramel, into a cardboard container to set.

Right, a bar of finished homemade lye soap takes about six weeks to make and costs around 50 cents.

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**\$70** original

**49<sup>99</sup>** sale

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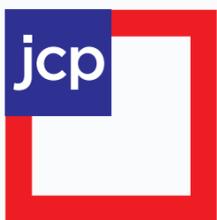
**39<sup>99</sup>**

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fair and square.  
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