

Soap Making

By Josephene C. Jones

The making of soap became quite an art and the housekeeper was indeed proud when she was successful in making a batch of good white soap.

For months she saved every scrap of fat not consumed by the family. All rinds from the pork, trimming from the meat, even the fat scraped from the table were stored away in a large crock or other receptacle to await soap making time. When enough was collected the lye was made ready for several days. These ashes were stored in a barrel and water added. After repeated stirring and skimmings the waste ash settled down to the bottom and the clear lye water was ready.

Out in the yard this lye water was heated in a large kettle and the grease added. The lye ate the grease and after slowly cooking for several hours a rich honey-like syrup formed. Now the testing began. With a saucer and spoon, a sample was tested with plain water; then lye water until her experienced eye found it was just right.

How happy she was when a spoonful set aside became firm and white. Carefully the soap was poured into the tubs to stand over tight to cool. First, however, part of it was “perfumed” with mint or some other fragrant herb for this was the hand soap and must be just as nice as she could possibly make it. After setting all night, the now congealed soap was cut into bars and allowed to dry for the place in the pioneer home.

In some homes, a leech was built for the extraction of the lye. To make a leech a log is hollowed out and the ends of boards inserted at angle forming slantinsides. In this the ashes were put and water poured over them and the water containing the lye was caught in buckets as it trickled from the end of the log. The lye was used not only in soap making, but was a softener for hard water and a cleanser for the whitening of the often scrubbed floor and table. Indeed it helped

greatly in the care of the immaculate little home.

When the pioneers made friends with their neighbors the Piute Indians, they were taught many useful things by these new acquaintances. Among other thing they taught them the use of the Indian soap root. This the ott of what they called the “ooze” plant which in California is known as the “Yucca” The root is a large tap root of a porous nature. When rubbed on the article to be washed it produces a slight lather which quickly removes dirt. The pioneers used this soap a great deal and found it excellent for wool, silk laces, and all dainty articles as it does not shrink wool or face pastel colors.

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