

2009 Soap Making Book Review

by Kerri Mixon of Pallas Athene Soap (Spring Valley, California)

Three noteworthy books on soap making were published in 2009. One is noteworthy because it is possibly the very best, most completely accurate and informative book ever published about beginning soap making. The second is fascinatingly artistic and the third is a devastating nightmare that may prove dangerous and worthy of a lawsuit.

Beginning Cold Process Soap Making

Basic Soap Making: All the Skills and Tools You Need to Get Started, Letcavage and Buck, ISBN 978-0-8117-3573-5, is the cold process soap book for which all soap makers have waited! This book is the most complete, comprehensive, accurate instruction manual on beginning soap making and is in brilliant pictogram format. The book contains literally hundreds of photographs and includes images of all steps and phases of cold process soap making, such as cutting, trimming, rebatching scraps, and packaging. Hands down, this is the most complete and most easily understandable beginning soap making book ever published. Even experienced professional soap makers should keep this amazing book within easy access to dazzle inquiring customers with photos of the art of handmade cold process soap making.

Melt and Pour Soap Crafting

Soapylove, Chialtas, ISBN 978-1-60061-170-4, is a gorgeously artistic instruction book for melt-and-pour soap making. This book includes such ingenious and clever melt-and-pour projects that it will have the most devoted cold process soap maker itching to run out for some melt-and-pour soap base. Soapylove is a beautiful addition to any soap making library.

A Book to Avoid

Soap Making: Self-Sufficiency, Ade, ISBN 978-1-60239-790-3, is useless as an instructional reference due to a lack of visual illustrations. The written information about soap making is inaccurate; this book overflows with misinformation. The abundant grammatical errors make it both difficult and painful to read. Many of the page numbers sited in the index are off by one or two pages, so navigation is agonizing. The soap recipes in this book incorrectly instruct soap makers to measure ingredients by volume, such as “cups” of oil or lye, instead of weight, such as “ounces” of oil or lye. On page 58, the author dangerously instructs new soap makers to “add water to the sodium hydroxide crystals.” As a matter of safety, new soap makers are always taught to carefully add the lye to the water and never the other way around. Never pour water onto lye, as this book instructs, because pouring water onto lye can dissolve the top layer of lye beads and form a crust to seal the dry lye on the bottom and keep it separated from the water on top. As the exothermic reaction progresses, heat will build beneath the crust until the gasses violently expand in an eruption of hot caustic lye solution, which is forebodingly known as the “volcano effect” and can cause serious lye burns and scars. Clearly, this book is dangerous, inaccurate, and quite possibly the worst soap making book ever published.

Soap Fact

Handmade soap differs greatly from commercial soap because handmade soap contains glycerin donated to the soap by natural whole oils. Page 12 of the aforementioned Soap Making: Self-Sufficiency incorrectly states, “the glycerin produced during the [commercial] saponification process is separated out.” Actually, according to the AOCS (American Oil Chemists’ Society), commercial soap companies do not siphon off the glycerin and remove it from the soap, they simply do not use whole oils. Instead, they make soap from a base of fatty acids, which are the lipid tails without the glycerol heads that would become free glycerin. So, simply stated, commercial soap companies do not remove the glycerin from their soaps; they never had any in the first place!

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