
Curing soap

Posted by Michael (UK) - 2004/01/01 08:49

"I,m rather hazy regarding the correct procedure for curing cold process soap. Two problems I frequently encounter are:

- (a) the soap takes a long time (several weeks) to harden properly.
- (b) the scent is weak (I use only pure essential oils)

According to the Susan Cavitch book the soap should be closely covered for about 24 hours and then wrapped in breathable material. However other people recommend wrapping in a blanket for the first 24 hours and then wrapping the soap in clingfilm.

Incidentally I hardly ever get soda ash on my soaps.

Any help would be very much appreciated."

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Re: Curing soap

Posted by Denise - 2004/01/01 09:56

"I wrap mine in blankets (towels actually) for the first 24 hours or until it doesn't feel warm anymore. Then I cut it and let it dry uncovered in racks. It takes 4-5 weeks to cure, this is normal. I don't package it until it feels like it's dried. But I too would like to hear how the others do it. Denise :) "

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Re: Curing soap

Posted by Zeta - 2004/01/01 11:40

"I place a blanket (thermal type) over my molds and leave them covered for 24 hours. After I cut the bars I put them on my curing racks to dry for about 6 weeks. I don't wrap them any sooner than I have to because I use cello bags instead of shrink wrap.

Michael, your soaps might be soft due to not using enough hard oils.

You might have to increase the amount of EO you use if the scent is weak. How much are you using per pound of base oils? I've found some EOs just don't hold up that well, but I'm making lavender soap using between .5 to .7 oz per pound.

Zeta "

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Re: Curing soap

Posted by Robin - 2004/01/01 11:52

"I hardly ever wrap/insulate to gel anymore as I started using the CPOP method (cold process oven process). Just in case you haven't heard of it...make your CP soap as usual, then pop it into an oven at the lowest temperature you can set your oven at. Some of the people on this board have a "warm" setting on their ovens. The lowest temp I have on my oven is 200-degrees. It usually takes about an hour to an hour and a half for my soap to reach full gel. I usually monitor the internal temperature of the soap with a thermometer and turn the oven off when the soap temp reaches between 180-190 degrees. Unless I need the oven for something, I leave the soap in the oven for a couple more hours to start cooling down. If I need the oven, then I just pull it out and set it on a counter to cool for 24 hours. Then I take it out of the mold and let it sit for another 24 hours before I cut it. After cutting, I stack it on the drying rack. I ALWAYS have a fan blowing on my drying rack. My soaps are usually dry enough to wrap in less than two weeks, but I never sell a soap until it's at least three weeks old. I'll use them myself before that timeframe and they are fine, but I feel better if I let them age another week before anyone else uses them. Just a personal thing with me.

I really do believe that doing the CPOP helps the cure/drying time move along quicker and having the fan blowing on the soaps helps too. I almost hate to make a milk soap anymore because I can't use the oven with those and even sitting in front of the fan they take longer to dry. I also do not wrap my soaps in any kind of cling wrap. I purchase a heavy card stock paper and cut a 2" strip and a 2-1/2" strip. The 2" strip is wrapped and taped lengthwise on the bar of soap and the 2-1/2" strip is wrapped and taped widthwise. This leaves all four corners of the soap open for sniffing and viewing, and

also lets air get to the soap. My ingredients label is placed over the seam on the back and my logo label is placed on the front.

Anyway, this is what works for me. There are a million good ideas on this board. You just have to find what works for you and go with it. Believe me, I've tried everything I can think of to accelerate the drying time...even locking my soaps in an airtight container with DampRid to suck the moisture out of them, but the fact is...time is what dries soap. You can speed it up a little with the oven and a fan, but you still have to be patient and let time do the majority of the work. "

Re: Curing soap - LONG

Posted by Maureen - 2004/01/01 19:34

"I haven't read the other responses, but because I sell often within a week and a half of production, I'll just go ahead and tell you what I do. Forgive me if I'm redundant with the other responses.

First, it sounds like you don't do a water discount. Try using less water... say 15% less than what you're using now. Water is the primary thing that keeps the soap soft, and you can get away with less hence harder soap quicker.

Now, the way I do ALL soaps is CP. I hesitate to use CPOP for one reason and that's because (a) I can do it well with my method achieving good gel, and (b) some FOs and EOs have a low flashpoint and too high a heat will burn off a lot of the scent.

So... what I do is go to light trace, add the stuff. You don't want pudding because the top won't be smooth. After pouring I place a piece of freezer paper (shiny side down) cut to fit the inside of the mold less 1/8". This prevents ash 100%. The molds now go into a styrofoam insulating box (that grapes were shipped to the shop in, ask at the produce department, mine were FREE). I put the cover on and tuck a double folded bath sheet around.

Check in 15 minutes. If it isn't hot yet, then you can ignore it. If you find it's in gel or rapidly going there, then check again in 1/2 hour - chances are it's very hot, so pull the insulation off for 5 minutes... replace and ignore. This keeps the soap from getting too hot.

I cut when the soap is cool. Rarely do I wait 24 hours, it isn't necessary. All you need is room temperature. When I see that the soap is almost cool, I remove from the insulation and sit on the table for a while. Make sure it's 100% cool or you'll get ash anyway - that's warm soap reacting with the air. I pull the soap out of the molds, check again to make sure it's all cool, and cut. I usually cut at 12 to 16 hours. Later only if I'm being lazy, doesn't hurt to wait 24 hours or more but don't wait too long.

The soap is then placed on their sides on cake racks. Same thing your mom cools a cake on, only I have industrial sized ones. That allows the air to get underneath and cure the soap evenly. No need to turn. AND DO NOT COVER THEM AT THIS POINT. They should be fairly hard in 24 hours.

Soap can be wrapped once it's hard, and will continue to dry even in the wrap. I wrap in cello and tie with raffia anytime after 1.5 weeks, longer is better of course. Some FOs will keep the soap softer longer, by the way. Oatmeal, Milk and Honey FO seems to do that, for example.

Anyway, this method of water discounting also prevents shrinkage. Your bars do not lose a lot of weight common to most soapers. The only time never to use a water discount is if working with an FO that accelerates trace, otherwise it's the way to go.

Good luck!

Mo"

Re: Curing soap - a little LONGER

Posted by Deb - 2004/01/01 21:37

"First it may be your recipe, depending on the oils you are using. A 100% olive recipe is going to take much longer to get hard (4 to 6 weeks) vs. a 100% tallow recipe (a day or two) Also most recipes in books, and on line have anywhere from a 35 to 40% water ratio, at most you only need 30% water ratio to oils. i.e. if your batch is 100 oz oils your water

would be 30 oz.

My soaps stay in a sustained gel for anywhere from 18 to 36 hours, because of my molds and the size of my batches, bigger batches will stay hot longer. Do not cut until the soap is completely cool.

Best bet is to post the recipe you are using, (or if you are uncomfortable with that) at least give us the % of liquid vs solid oils, and the % of water. Also, a highly supefatted soap may be softer and take longer to cure.

Generally a firm soap will have at least 50% to 60% solid oils to the liquid oils, and a 30% water ratio.

All that being said, the rule of thumb is to allow your soaps to "cure" for 3to 6 weeks, depending on the recipe.

I like Maureen, short my water considerably, I generally only use 20% to 25% water to oils, but I have been doing this a while, wouldn't recommend it when starting out, and my soaps are firm in a few days, and I can sell after 2 weeks on the curing rack, w/out much more additional shrinkage from loss of water. My soaps are also fully saponified at cut because of the sustained gel, so no worries about that either.

HTH

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Thanks!!

Posted by Denise - 2004/01/02 00:42

Wow! What great detailed information everyone gave. I really appreciate this. Thanks to all who contributed! Denise :)

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Re: Curing soap

Posted by Michael (UK) - 2004/01/03 02:20

Thanks very much to everyone who replied to my original query. The replies contain much useful information that I need time to digest. Regarding Robin's suggestion about curing soap in the oven - what kind of moulds do you use and what are they made of (presumably plastic would melt)? How easy is it to extricate the soap from the mould?

Thanks

michael

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Re: Curing soap

Posted by Robin - 2004/01/03 04:27

"Hi Michael,

I am using the wooden molds purchased from our wonderful hosts, Ye Olde Soap Shoppe. I have both the small and medium molds. I line my molds using the Reynolds Oven Cooking Bags. I use those mostly because I find them easier to work with and I know they can take the heat of the oven. Parchment paper would also be fine in the oven though.

The soap really isn't hard to get out of the mold. The small mold is actually easy. The medium mold requires more work, but only because the block of soap is so dog-gone heavy I can't grab the excess lining on opposite corners and lift it right out like I can with the small mold. For the medium mold I sit it up on it's edge and alternate tugs on each corner until it comes out. It isn't hard because there's a problem with the soap, it's just because it's such a big heavy block of soap.

I could cut the soap as soon as I take it out of the mold. I just prefer to let it sit in the air for 24 hours before I cut it. That probably has more to do with my over-extended time schedule than anything else. "