

handmilling or rebatching

If you are unhappy with the result of a batch of soap you have made you can either recycle or reconstitute it instead of throwing the whole batch away. This provides another avenue for creativity and fun.

In the commercial world of soap making, heavy duty machinery is used in the milling processes to create the beautifully smooth and highly fragranced triple-milled varieties. Basically, extra thin sheets of soap are cut from a pre-made soap base (without any glycerin); it is then flaked, pulverised and re-melted into a clear, smooth soapy broth into which various additional ingredients are mixed and moulded to produce the soaps.

Although we do not have the machinery at home we can still reconstitute our cured or partially-cured handmade soaps in a similar way. This technique has many advantages:

- it reduces the vicious action of the sodium hydroxide on colourants and fragrances offering brighter colours and longer lasting fragrances
- skin nourishing additives such as aloe vera, fresh herbs, herbal infusions and decoctions retain their nutrients and colour longer
- it also makes it easier to use fancy moulds and the soap releases more easily from the moulds

Hand milling is a very simple process although it is fair to say that there may be some difficulty in achieving a smooth, creamy, pourable soap broth. Even if the mixture turns out a bit lumpy the soap will be absolutely wonderful. The following method provides a good starting point and the more experience you gain the more confident you will be.

step 1

- make a batch of soap and set aside to cure

step 2

- using a hand-held grater, grate the soap into the finest consistency possible. Weigh it and set aside.

step 3

- preheat the slow cooker on the medium heat setting. Weigh the water

in a measuring jug (using approximately 12oz (340g) to every 1lb (454g) of grated soap) and add to the slow cooker.

step 4

- add the grated soap to the water in the slow cooker and stir with a spatula until all the soap is covered with water
- cover the mixture and leave it to simmer for an hour, stirring intermittently until as smooth a paste as possible is achieved

step 5

- turn the slow cooker off and allow the soap mixture to cool a little. Add colour, fragrance, oils and other supplements, ensuring they are evenly distributed throughout the mixture.

step 6

- pour the mixture into a pre-greased mould and set aside in a warm place for three days to get dry and hard

step 7

- remove the soap from the mould, cut into bars and allow it to harden for a further two weeks before use