

# introduction

Soap making is an addictive and satisfying process. It is a rewarding experience to be able to craft something – an everyday item – that is useful, wholesome and beautiful. Handmade soap is practical, alluring and romantic.

I started hand crafting soaps when I was 14 years old at my granny Annie's bungalow in the little seaside resort village of Runaway Bay in Jamaica where I grew up. My grandmother was a village midwife and herbal doctor, present at nearly all births and always on hand with various herbal remedies for every type of ailment the villagers might have. I never visited a doctor as I was always purged, scrubbed and soothed with her unique concoctions. She grew all her herbs in our gardens or sourced them herself from the forest where they grew wild. I learned to identify, harvest, dry and prepare the plants for use in the soaps, balms, creams, tinctures, poultices, baths, syrups and teas that were crafted in our kitchen. Just writing about it now, I can still smell the fragrant mix of herbs, roots and spices all over the bungalow – the bygone days of my childhood! Under the watchful eyes of my grandmother I learned to make my own products, especially soaps as there was a shortage at that time in Jamaica. I learned to make virgin coconut and castor oils and made caustic potash from the ashes of woods used in our wood burning stove when we were unable to get caustic soda at the shops.

When I moved to London in the mid-1980s I continued to make and use my own natural products but my soap making was relegated for some time, due to the long hours I spent working and studying for my chosen profession, to making the occasional special gift when I was short of cash. My passionate love affair with soap making was seriously rekindled in 2004 as a creative outlet from my stressful and demanding role as a Human Resources Manager for a large organisation and it also provided the opportunity to present unique gifts to my friends and family at a time when I didn't have much spare money. Although I was successful in my career I was dissatisfied with the quality of my life at the time as I found it difficult to step off the merry-go-round of constant pressures and obligations; it appeared to be a cycle of boom and bust with the constant bill payments, debts, and the robbing-of-Peter-to-pay-Paul type of scenario. I had had enough and the wind of change started blowing my

way and gathered momentum when I decided and made a commitment to become debt free, pursue a much simpler lifestyle and have more freedom and control over my life. I attended an Anthony Robbins' Personal Development seminar at the Excel Centre and walked on hot coals. I learned some invaluable lessons at the seminar, confronted my fears and was fully motivated and ready to take my big slice of the good life!

Not certain what I was going to do at the time, I sought divine inspiration and went down on my knees and prayed. My desire was strong; then one night I had a dream – or should I say a visit from my grandmother (this is no joke!) – and was kindly reminded of my other unused talents. I didn't take the dream seriously and forgot about it. Then during the weekend following the dream I was in a second-hand bookshop in Bromley, Kent looking for a novel when a little book fell off the shelf and hit me on my head. When I picked up the book and saw the title *Soap – Making It and Enjoying It* by Anne Bramson I stood frozen to the spot in disbelief. Slowly the message became clear to me, so without any hesitation I paid the 50 pence for the book and went straight home.

I never looked back and since then soap making has impacted my life in a big way. I moved from my flat in London and made myself at home in a ten-acre woodland forest on the south Pacific coast of Costa Rica. I made a simple log home from the trees that were felled on the property where I established my Caribbean Paradise – Natural Artisan Soaps and Body Care business. I grow most of the botanicals and distil some of the essential oils used in making my unique brand of products; my soap making and body care business has enabled me to make a worthwhile contribution to other people's lives by creating employment and donating to charitable organisations within my local community.

Not only am I committed to making the best natural products possible but also to educating and sharing my skills and knowledge with others. In my quest for excellence as a professional soap maker I have flown around the world to attend numerous natural soap making and cosmetics courses and workshops; became a member of the Soap Makers' Guild in the USA and found myself a mentor in Sandy Maine, founder and CEO of Sun Feather Natural Soap Company in Potsdam, New York, USA.

The desire to expand the knowledge of this ancient craft, the influence of aroma crafting and the use of botanicals to heal and enhance well-

being with as many people as possible has led me to write this book. I want to share with you my knowledge of the ways these ancient arts and science can de-stress, relax and rejuvenate us within our modern lives. Soap making and the use of botanicals should not be perceived as activities only experts can practise. Discover for yourself the secrets of the fascinating saponification process, the fragrances and botanicals that relax, stimulate, soothe and dispel aches, tension, and pain and enhance beautiful skin. You can embark on this colourful and fragrant journey of the senses and learn to explore them all in extraordinary new ways. I invite you, dear reader, to discover the joys and pleasures of learning these techniques for recreation and relaxation, and to experience, as I have, the simplicity of health, beauty, well-being and life itself.

If you love whipping up your own concoctions in your kitchen, love herbs and spices and if the idea of working with beautiful colours, aromas and textures really grabs you then you will love the art and craft of soap making.

Making soap is very easy. In *Make Your Own Natural Soaps: All Vegetable Herbal Recipes* you will acquire all the knowledge you need to make luxuriously moisturising soaps even if it is your first attempt. You will be able to create soaps for your own and your family's needs, soaps for special occasions and gifts that are truly original.

You will be amazed to see your simple concoctions morph into splendid little gems right before your eyes. Your life may never be the same again once you have developed your soaping skill; new friends will be found and old ones will be around more often eager to try each batch of your new soap. Be warned, it is clean fun!

The soap-making processes covered in this book are divided into two main areas: hot process and cold process with the hot process covering both liquid and cream soap making. I hope that you will be encouraged and inspired to experience the joy and satisfaction of creating something practical, wholesome and beautiful for yourself, family, friends and your home.

The recipes in this book unless otherwise stated will yield approximately 3lb (1.36kg) oil/fat weight of beautiful bar soaps, 6lb (2.72kg) liquid soap paste and 5lb (2.26kg) cream soap. You have a choice of using either the hot or cold process method with a little variation as indicated

for making bar soaps. There is a focus on using all natural wholesome ingredients; it is important to me not to use any animal fats, which is why my recipes only include vegetable oils and all the additives and colourants I use are botanicals or herbal extracts rather than synthetic ingredients. That's where the sub-title for the book, *all vegetable herbal recipes*, came from. But there are no hard and fast rules as you can substitute ingredients to create your own masterpiece; yes, you are encouraged to break the rules and have fun!

Happy soaping!!

*Maxine*