equipment

fig 5: basic equipment a) soap pot, b) hand blender, c) digital scale, d) thermometer, e) & f) spatulas, g) beaker, h) & i) measuring jugs, j) stainless steel container used to measure caustic soda, k) stainless steel funnel, l) slow cooker, m) stove

You do not need special equipment to make soaps at home. You may already have the essential pieces of equipment in your kitchen. Although it is quite alright to use your current kitchen equipment it is better to have separate sets for your soap making adventures. Once you have gained some experience making a few batches of soap you may adapt the list below to suit your needs. It is important to note that sodium and potassium hydroxides react with aluminium, therefore, select suitable containers such as glass, heavy duty plastics or stainless steel in which to mix the caustic solution.

stainless steel pots

You will need two stainless steel pots for the cold process method. One large enough to hold approximately 2 litres and the other can be slightly smaller. The larger will be your mixing pot and the smaller one will be

used for melting the fats. These pot sizes are based on the batch sizes for the recipes in this book.

hand blender

This is an essential piece of equipment – a real shortcut in reaching 'trace'.

hand-held mixer

This is essential for beating cream soap to a 'whipped-cream' consistency.

slow cooker

This is essential for the 'hot' process method. A cooker with a capacity of 6 litres and low, medium and high heat settings is recommended. Also, bear in mind that all slow cookers heat differently and cooking times may vary.

spice grinder

This is necessary for grinding and chopping fresh and dried botanicals.

digital scales

Soap making requires accurate measurements and a digital scale will ensure that your ingredients are correctly measured. The scale should have a 'tare' function button. This function enables you to deduct the weight of the container in which the ingredient is held when taking a measurement.

measuring jugs

2 one litre (2 pint) heat-proof glass measuring jugs would be useful.

rubber spatulas

Use a heavy-duty rubber spatula for mixing the caustic soda or potash with the water to make the caustic solution and another for stirring and scraping out the inside of your soap pot so as not to waste your ingredients.

small glass bowls

These are good for holding small quantities of ingredients such as essential or fragrance oils, colourings and herbs and spices. Ramekin dishes are ideal.

plastic bucket

A five-litre clear plastic bucket is useful to sequester liquid and cream soaps.

piping bag

Use for filling jars with cream soap.

jars

These are useful for finished liquid and cream soaps.

small measures

A set of measuring spoons from ¼ teaspoon to 1 tablespoon is required

thermometers

Two good quality glass cooking thermometers that can measure temperatures of 18-104°C (0-220°F) are essential for measuring the temperature of the caustic solution and oils.

cheese wire, sharp knife or soap cutter

One of these is essential for cutting your soap into bars. However, a soap cutter is best for a professional finish.

moulds

Heavy duty plastic moulds are best as they are long lasting; but wooden moulds or even a shoe box can be used as a mould. If you do not wish to invest too much money, just look around your local supermarket for unusual plastic packaging such as yoghurt pots, biscuit or chocolate trays and in your local hardware store for plastic drain pipes.

strainers or cheese cloth

These are good for straining herbal infusions and decoctions.

blankets

The cold process method requires a large blanket or towel to insulate the mould after pouring the soap mixture.

greaseproof paper

Greaseproof, parchment or waxed paper is required to line the mould.