

# Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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## I'm Cleaning Up

Like many of you, I have an interest in many things, most of which have no resemblance to each other.

A few weeks ago, while working at my daughter's store, Rustic Roots, in Turlock, a lady and her husband came in to shop. I began to chit-chat with them as I so often do with many of our customers, and discovered this lady makes her own soap. This immediately captured my attention, as I have had an interest in learning to make soap for the past several years. I've done a lot of study and research on soap-making over the Internet, but hadn't met someone I could really learn from, and this lady seemed to be just what I was looking for.

We talked for a while, with me explaining why I wanted to learn to make soap. Since Jenny's store is a small "mom & pop" operation, I have thought for some time that it would be fun to have special bars of soap for sale made with the Rustic Roots logo imprinted on each bar. Mary Anne offered to show me how! I jumped at the chance.

The date we set for making a batch of homemade soap was Monday, May 1<sup>st</sup>. I told Isaura about this opportunity and she thought it was great. But when she heard we were going to make it on Monday the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, she said, "*Can I come? I'd love to learn!*" I responded, "*Of course!*"

We met Mary Anne at the store at 8:30am on the appointed day. She brought all the physical items we would need along with some of the ingredients, and we brought all the rest of the necessary ingredients. We used a room in the back of the store that Jenny uses to hold her bi-monthly painting classes for those who want to learn how to paint furniture with the vintage/stressed look that is so popular today.

So, with everything laid out, we began the process of making our very first batch of soap. First up on the things to do was mixing lye with oil. I have never worked with lye, but I know it can be very dangerous if mishandled. Once it is mixed with water it heats up to nearly a boiling temperature. The chemical reaction between the lye and water is instantaneous, but before using it with any other ingredients, it must be allowed to cool down to 100 degrees which takes about an hour.

My one and only experience with lye was while I was in the Marine Corps. It was 1972, and I was assigned to an EA6A squadron at Cubi Point in the Philippines.

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Subic Bay Naval Base was next door to Cubi Point. Subic had a football team which I played for. It was made up of sailors and Marines. We played against Air Force teams from Clark Air Force Base (the Philippines), and also against Yokosuka Naval Base, and Yokota Air Force Base, both in Japan. One of the teams we played had just lined their field in the white chalk you typically see on football fields everywhere. But there was one problem! The groundskeepers accidentally used bags of lye, believing it to be chalk. As the game was played more and more of the players were complaining about a burning sensation under their pads. As the chalk was rubbed into uniforms and skin, it was mixed with sweaty bodies creating the right conditions for some serious burns. It was so severe that a number of our black teammates had large swatches of skin burned so brutally that the black pigmentation was gone, leaving the pinkest pink skin you'll ever see. I don't know if their coloring ever returned in those areas, but I learned then and there to be very careful with lye!

Back to the soap. The next step was to mix the oils and bring this to a boil. This too, would be allowed to cool to 100 degrees. Once these two "hot" items had cooled sufficiently, they were mixed with an electric hand-mixer, bringing the lye/oil mixture to the consistency of pudding. The process from that point is fairly simple and straight forward. We set out the soap molds to receive the mixture, but first we had to measure in separate bowls the amount of the soap mix needed to fill the molds to be used. Since I was experimenting, I wanted to make three different "loaves" of soap with different fragrances. To accomplish this, you would add your fragrances, thoroughly stirring this into the batter. We, of course, made one with a lemon fragrance, which was Isaura's choice. The other two loaves were my choice. One was cinnamon, and the other was Pappy's Lemon Spice. I have wanted to make soap that has an aroma that men would like. In other words: Manly Soap! If I can figure out how to make fragrances of Engine Oil, or Gun Powder, or even Old Baseball Gloves, I'll be happy! My neighbor, Dave, has already said he wants one of the Pappy's bars!

The three loaves are now cut into bars and setting for four weeks to "cure." That is, they harden, and therefore are less likely to dissolve quickly.

Oh, yeah! Almost forgot. I ordered a special mold which was shipped from Poland. In every detail, it's cast in the shape of a Hand Grenade! Is that beautiful, or what! I'm going to have to create a camouflage color for this soap, then add to it the Gun Powder fragrance.

I think I'll name it, Savon de Grenade! (French for "Soap Grenade"). That would be the bomb!