Gathering Summary: Homemade Laundry Powder by Sheree Tompkins, February 27, 2013

Summary by Catherine Haug;

Photo, right, by Sheree Tompkins; other images as noted.

This was our first event at a new venue: the Crestview Senior Housing Clubhouse. We all sat around a big table while Sheree demonstrated how to make laundry soap at another table.

See Sheree's handout, which includes equipment, ingredients and instructions: Homemade Laundry Powder or Liquid, by Sheree Tompkins (1-page file).

Equipment & Ingredients for Homemade Laundry Soap

Homemade Laundry Powder

Sheree became interested in making her own laundry soap when she realized she had health issues with store-bought laundry detergent.

All-natural ingredients:

She uses her own homemade laundry bar soap as the base, but you could use a commercial laundry soap bar (See The EssentiaList: Soap vs Detergent for more about different soaps):

- Sheree recommends **Kirk's Original Coco Castile**, which is made from coconut oil, water, lye, vegetable glycerine and natural fragrance.
- **Fels Naphtha** is also popular but it is made from petroleum, so is not a sustainable product and poses some dangers to the environment.
- **Sheree's bar soap** is made from lard she renders herself from pork fat available at Farm to Market Pork in the West Valley. She sells this soap, but the commercial soap is less expensive.
- She advises against using body soaps, as they are 'superfatted,' meaning they have more fat than lye, and can cause stains on your clothes.
- Other ingredients for her recipe are: **borax, baking soda, and washing soda**.

Her method:

Sheree started to grate 2 bars of her soap into a bowl, then gave it to us to finish grating, so we could get the feel of it. Fresher bars are softer and easier to grate than old ones.

Meanwhile, she measured the borax, washing soda and baking soda into a bowl and mixed them together. Then added the grated soap and processed in a food processor (or blender), in batches, to turn the grated soap into fine granules. When all was processed, she put it through one more time, as she believes this keeps the soap from settling out.

Once finished, we each scooped some into a baggie to take home.

Q: Can this be used in an HE (High Efficiency) washer?

A: Yes. Because they are a low-suds soap, both powder and liquid can be used in an HE.

Liquid laundry soap:

Her recipe is also in the handout. Basically, she takes some of her powdered soap mix and boils it in water, then dilutes with more water. She did not demonstrate this.

The alternative way to make the liquid soap is available on many websites; it does not start with the laundry powder blend but rather the individual ingredient. It is also boiled and then blended. See:

- The Thrifty Mama: Homemade Liquid Laundry Soap (includes photos of each step)
- TLC: Homemade Liquid Laundry Soap
- MileHi Mamma: Homemade laundry soap for an HE washer
- Becky's Homemade Laundry Soap (You Tube video, 9 minutes)

Q: Which is better, powder or liquid?

A: Powder is better for regular loads and heavily soiled clothes.Liquid is best for situations when you would otherwise use Woolite - lingerie and other delicates.

Q: How much do you use?

A: 1 Tbsp powder for regular loads, or 2 Tbsp for heavily soiled. Don't use more than that or you'll see a lot of lint in your dryer and your fabrics will thin out more quickly.

Liquid: This depends on how much water you work into the mix. Sheree's recipe on the handout indicates 1/2 cup per load.

Q: What about fabric softener?

A: Sheree fills a downy ball with vinegar, to put in the washer (see also The Essentialist Kitchen Hint: Natural fabric softener); and felted wool balls in the dryer.

Cora Reynolds memory of making laundry soap bars

Cora, a resident of the senior housing complex, was born in 1916 in North Carolina. They didn't have electricity or refrigeration, so they used a spring house as a refrigerator.

Cora still has a thick North Carolina accent, so I didn't get all of what she told us, but the gist is that when they slaughtered a pig, they cleaned all the guts and fat out of the abdomen, saved what they wanted to keep (such as liver, kidney, and small intestines for sausage casings), then mixed what was left with hardwood ashes and cold water from the spring. The ash and water makes lye, which reacts with the fats in the guts to make soap. The lye also eats up the other tissue, so all that is left is the soap. Then they shaped it into bars using a mold, and laid out the bars in the springhouse to harden.

Sheree added how you can tell when you have the right amount of lye: an egg will float, a feather won't burn up.

[Cat's note: What is a spring house? See The EssentiaList: Refrigeration without Electricity for description, or Stone spring house at Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve, for an example. A spring house uses moving cold water to chill the insulated spring house, which was used for keeping perishables like milk, cream , eggs, and fresh meats.]

Kassandra's homemade citrus cleaner

Kassandra mentioned her homemade citrus cleaner, which was previously published on this site: Kitchen hint: Homemade citrus cleaner. Sheree is trying a twist on this method: putting whole peels (with pith) into a jar of vinegar as she uses her oranges. But so far, they are just soaking with the vinegar in a jar.

Kassandra also uses orange juice as a hairspray, which she will send as another kitchen hint.

GMO and Non-GMO Tipping Point Network (TPN) discussion

(Frankenfood image, right, used by permission from the Organic Consumer's Association).

Frankenfood

Sheree shared some handouts from the TPN regarding GMOs.

Cat and Sheree described what a GMO is; see earlier posts on this topic:

- More on GMO Labeling: "*GMO or GE foods are created by manipulating the DNA material of different species that would never breed naturally – like the banana-fish Frankenfood logo shown above.*"
- How GMOs destroy life, soil and your gut probiotics:
  "*While **genetic breeding** combines the DNA of two varieties of the same species, or of two related species by normal sexual breeding, **genetic engineering** removes part of the DNA of one species, then combines it with the DNA of a totally different species [that would never breed together naturally]. This is done by manipulating the biochemistry of the DNA during cell division (splitting of one cell into two new cells) and DNA replication (producing two identical copies of the cell's genetic material). ...**For example**, ... part of the DNA from Bt bacteria, [is] inserted into the DNA of corn, to produce a totally new species of corn [Bt-corn] that produces the Bt toxin as a built-in pesticide.*"

We also discussed Roundup Ready Crops. [for more see How GMOs destroy life, soil and your gut probiotics

See also The harm of GMO.