

Lye: Information & Safety ☞

Sodium Hydroxide, also referred to as caustic soda or lye, is an essential ingredient in soap.

Fat + Lye (alkaline) = Soap

The alkaline we use to make soap is lye. Lye is commonly used as a drain cleaner and must be treated with care. Lye comes in dry form and must be added to water to use it to make soap. Lye crystals look like table salt or sugar. Lye can also come in powder, flake form or beads.

You can buy the lye you need to make soap online. Some grocery and hardware stores still carry lye in the cleaning section, with the drain cleaners. If you buy your lye at a local store, make sure the only ingredient is Sodium Hydroxide. Important: Drano has bits of aluminum flakes mixed into it so do not use this product when making soap. Lye is sometimes used to make food—soft pretzels are given a lye bath before being baked in the oven and lutefisk uses lye as a soaking agent.

You can store lye in the original airtight container. Because of its caustic nature, it must be stored in a dry place, away from children and pets. You will dissolve the lye in water when you are ready to use it for making soap.

HANDLING LYE:

Lye is a hazardous substance and should be treated carefully. It is safe for use in home soapmaking but some precautions must be taken:

Always wear protective goggles! Getting lye, lye mixed with water or fresh soap in your eyes is an emergency. The best way to handle a lye emergency is to prevent it. If an accident does occur, immediately run your eye under cold water and seek medical help.

Always wear protective clothing. Once you mix your lye with water, it will heat

up quickly due to a chemical reaction. If you splash or spill lye on your skin, you will get a chemical burn. Protect your hands with gloves, and wear long sleeved clothing. If you get lye, lye water, or fresh soap on you rinse immediately with water for several minutes. It may not hurt instantly, but a splash can and will cause real damage.

Mix lye in a large heat-safe, non-reactive container preferably inside of a sink. If you prefer, you can mix your lye outdoors.

Always **ADD LYE TO WATER**. Sprinkle the lye on top of the water for best results, and stir with a stainless steel spoon or heat resistant plastic utensil. Never pour water onto a pile of dry lye, a severe, volcanic reaction can occur.

Work in a well ventilated area and avoid breathing in lye fumes (these are strongest when you first add the lye to the water).

Do not allow children or pets into your soaping space while you are working.

Use dedicated soap making utensils and tools. Don't use your soap tools to make food.

IN CASE OF A LYE EMERGENCY

The following information is taken from the Safety Data Sheet for lye:

IF SWALLOWED: Rinse mouth with water and drink one or two glasses of water. Do not induce vomiting! Immediately get medical attention or call your poison control center at 1-800-222-1222.

IF IN EYES: Immediately flush eyes with water. Remove any contact lenses and continue to flush eyes with water for at least 20 minutes. Immediately get medical attention or call your poison control center at 1-800-222-1222.