

# The Business Of Candle (And Soap) Making

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## The Business Of Candle (And Soap) Making

Create and market your hand-made candles. This business, along with its closely related cousins soapmaking and plastercraft does not automatically progress from the hobby to business stage without a good deal of planning and effort.

The volume sellers must compete with cheaper, less stylish mass-produced and often imported products. But, with perseverance and ingenuity, it can be done!

Candle making is a highly versatile craft -- one that encompasses unlimited opportunities for creativity. Candles can be dipped, molded, rolled, fused, layered, sculptured or any combination of processes. They may be colored (dyed, painted or tinted) within and without;; they can be scented or can have embedded materials such as beads or shells, coated or whipped (foamed).

An illustration of candle making ingenuity and versatility is hot yellow-orange wax poured over small ice cubes. When the ice melts and the wax sets, it leaves cavities that look like Swiss cheese!

### BASIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CANDLE MAKING ARE:

- \* a place to work (it is too dangerous and messy for the kitchen),
- \* adequate storage space for materials,
- \* a relatively cool place to put finished candles (they will sag in hot temperatures),
- \* utensils to melt and blend the waxes, molds and wax additives.

Startup supplies should include wax (sold in sheets or slabs), colors, stearic acid, temperature gauge, double broiler, a heating medium, molds and mold accessories (wick, lead, clay, etc.).

Equipment and supplies to get started at the crafts level should run in neighborhood of \$200 from a professional supplier like Pourette (see Business Sources).

The candle making process is not complicated, but does require time and attention to detail for safety reasons as well as product quality.

Melting wax is highly volatile and can catch fire easily (this is why double broilers are used)if one isn't very careful. In the standard molding process, raw wax is melted and brought to about

180 degrees Fahrenheit.

During this time, certain additives such as stearic acid, colors and scents are added. Meanwhile, the mold is cleaned and sprayed with release (silicon). A wick inserted from the bottom and tied to a stick across the top and the hole in the bottom sealed with clay.

Note that the top of the mold equates to the bottom of the candle, and vice versa! Heavy lead wires (weights) are wrapped around the bottom of the mold.

The mold placed in a convenient position to receive the hot wax. When the wax is ready it is slowly and carefully poured down the side of the mold to prevent bubbles from forming.. The mold is filled to the top.

The remaining wax is kept at ready temperature and used to refill the hollow that forms as the wax shrinks, a natural result of the cooling process.

During this process the mold is frequently placed in cool water to speed the cooling process (the reason for the lead wire). If the candles meant to be hollow (like hurricane candle),, the still molten center is poured back as soon as the sides cool to the desired thickness (about 1/2 inch). When cool, the candle is removed from the mold, the wick trimmed and any final touches made.

Molds can be solid plaster of pairs,metal or metal shells, or flexible plastic. The flexible plastic and metal molds are the most popular. It is difficult to make your own molds for many projects. Most anything can be used for a mold -- from hollowed out wet sand to paper cones.

To make a flexible rubber mold, coat the subject with the commercial silicon formula and paint on successive coats (after each coat dries) of compound until the desired thickness is reached.

Allow your mold to cure and then simply peel it off and start making casts. The procedure for using most molds is similar except that some need to be fastened together (2 or more parts and some need to be supported (in sand, plaster or even water).

There are unlimited variations that can result in strikingly different and very impressive candles.

One is dipping a partially formed candle into vats of different colored wax, then peeling back layers with a knife to reveal the contrasting colors and textures.

Another is filling a cavity in damp sand with wax, which yields a candle with a sandy surface.

One "secret" technique was discovered by accident. A rubber mold was made of a wooden statue purchased in the Philippines. The statue had been made by aborigines who used shoe polish for a "stained" finish.

The heat from the mold curing process caused the shoe polish to break away from the wood and mar the smooth finish. The resulting mold imparted a pitted or frosted type surface to the molded candle -- not desired (and expected) smooth shiny surface.

The candle maker made several black candles and applied bronze. "rub and Buff" and the results were fantastic. The candles looked like they were made of solid bronze and sold like wildfire!

The way to get started is to order supplies and begin as a craft or hobby. Get your wax from as close to home as possible to save on freight (you will need about 50lbs. to start). When you feel confident of your ability and have a pretty good idea of the market, you are ready to consider becoming a business. Make up some samples, take some pictures and sell.

The difficult part is marketing ( due to competition from commercial, import and hobby candle makers). Some suggested techniques are:

- a. Concentrate initially on a few items that you can produce expertly on a fairly large scale for wholesaling to gift stores. Examples: Anniversary or hurricane candles.
- b. Develop an "original" candle or series and market them as exclusives, either wholesale or retail. Examples: Statue of local hero, school emblem.
- c. Visit local retailers and ask what they could use at what price; plan your production with their responses in mind.
- d. Set up a display (rent a window in a vacant store) to show candles you have to offer; include a sign with your number or address.
- e. Organize candle making classes, charge a fee and sell not only the finished products but supplies as well.
- f. Rent a booth at a good flea market each holiday season and "test" the market and sell of any remaining stock.
- g. Have professional pictures taken of your best work, make up a catalog or send the pictures and descriptions (of candles you can

mass produce) to catalog houses.

Anyone who works with candles just a few weeks will automatically come up with numerous original ideas and variations.

That is one of the beauties of this craft -- it almost forces you to be creative! Whether you produce a low volume of exquisite, high quality candles or a high volume of easier to produce candles, big ones or little ones is entirely up to you.

One candle may be highly profitable if it is a work of art. Note that candle making does not restrict you to wax only. You can sell other items that are decorated or complimented by candles, such as driftwood centerpieces with candles.

Soap making is very similar to candle making in that they are both molded, colored, and scented.

In fact, many of the molds and ingredients are interchangeable. Plaster craft is also related (the same molds can be used, so long as they are thoroughly cleaned).

For ceramics you use totally different and much more expensive) equipment, though many of the artistic skills are very similar.

The most glaring potential problem area in candle making is the danger of fire from the wax. Don't even THINK of melting wax without a good double broiler and fire extinguisher handy.

If the wax were to boil over, splash onto an open flame (or red heating element) a very serious fire could result. Anytime you are melting wax, make sure it is watched CONSTANTLY and that it is not allowed to get too hot.

## BUSINESS SOURCES

POURETTE MFG. CO., 6818 Roosevelt Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, 206/525-4488. Candle and soap making equipment and supplies. Old, reliable company.

CAROLINA SOAP & CANDLE MAKERS, Southern Pines, NC 28387. Line of wholesale candles.

K & L CANDLES, Box 322, Warren, RI 02885. Line of religious and 250 other types of candles and related products.