

stamping lifestyle

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Do-It-Yourself Holiday Gifts on a Budget



Soapsicles
and other
sudsy gift ideas



Affordable
(and priceless)
Gifts From the Heart

DIY Gifts on a Budget

by Lynn Mercurio

In today's frugal economy, we're all looking for ways to keep costs down without sacrificing good taste and the opportunity to give. Searching for the perfect gift for a grandparent, teacher, co-worker or child can be a challenge especially if you want to give them something special without breaking the bank. Here are a few great ideas that will have your friends giving you the ultimate nod of approval when they unwrap these impressive handmade soaps and bath salts. The best part is that no one will know these projects cost only a few of dollars to create.

Soapsicles

Soapsicles make a great gift for a child, or just for an adult who is a child at heart. While you won't want to eat these tasty looking treats, the smile they bring will be the same as the icy ones in summertime. To get started, stop by your local dollar store and pick up one or more clear or colored glycerin soaps. Just think of all the possibilities for creative packaging, but please remind parents to keep these out of reach of younger children who may find them tempting and try to eat them.

1. Coat the interior of each of your Popsicle molds with vegetable spray.
2. Cut up your glycerin soap into small cubes or break your left over bars into pieces and place into your microwave safe container.
3. Heat the container just until melted
4. Add soap dye and/or fragrance if desired
5. Pour into your popsicle mold
6. Cover the tops of each mold with aluminum foil and insert popsicle stick through the foil. This will keep the stick in place while the soap sets up.
7. Allow to cool (2 or 3 hours)
8. Insert your butter knife into the sides of your mold to loosen and then using the stick, pull free of the mold.

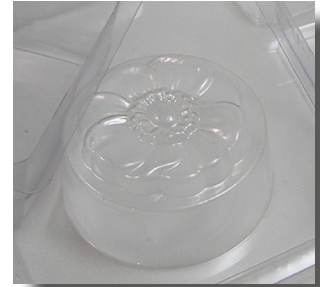
Here's What You'll Need to make Soapsicles:

- Popsicle molds (remember your old Tupperware ones you haven't used in years?)
- Popsicle sticks
- Microwave safe container
- Inexpensive glycerin soap or your scraps from partially used glycerin bars. (You DO save these don't you?)
- Fragrance oil, if desired but not required
- Soap dye, if desired, but not required. The local Michael's store carries these – 3 to a package for \$2.99. A little goes a long way when it comes to color, so you won't need much. Food coloring is not a good option for this project as this could possibly stain the hands when used, and no one wants to be surprised with purple hands.
- Aluminum foil
- Non-stick vegetable spray
- Butter knife



Soap Molds and Milk Cartons

If soapsicles aren't your style, there are various soap molds that you can buy from Joann's or Michaels for very little cash. For a more homespun look of handmade soap, try pouring your soap into a clean paper milk carton. Using the quart size milk container made of paper, cut the top off then quart container and use for your mold. Allow the soap to cool before peeling away the paper. The wax lining of the milk carton releases the soap easily to reveal a block of soap that can be sliced into bar sized pieces with a knife that has been heated with hot water.



To remove the marks made from the knife, simply run the soap under water and use your hands to blend down any jagged edges. Allow the bars to dry before packaging them. Raffia wrappers give a nice home spun feel to this special handmade gift.

Let's not forget those who work with their hands, whether in the garage or the garden, those grimy hands need a little something extra to get them clean. To create an effective hand-made soap sure to help remove the grit and grime, but yet leave the skin feeling pampered and not rough, just use the same process as above but add 1 to 2 teaspoons of cornmeal. The grittiness of the meal will help wash away the extra ground in dirt.

Bath Salts

So now that you have the soaps all made, it's time for a relaxing hot bath with some easy to make bath salts sure to sooth away the stresses of the day. To make your own bath salts you will need:

- Epsom salts
- Essential or Fragrance Oils
- Stick to mix (kitchen skewers work great)
- Dye Ink reinkers
- Containers for your salts (I used tubes, but recycling baby food jars or even empty Frappaccino bottles would also work, although you may have to double or triple the recipe to distribute colors and fragrances to the shade and strength you desire.

For the project listed here I chose three fragrances that matched the colors I was using Vanilla, Lavender and Spring Fresh. Pour your salts into your containers leaving just a little room to allow for stirring. Add two or three drops of your fragrance to your jars—a little goes a long way.

To add color to your salts, drop one drop of a reinker into your salts. You may need more than one drop if using an especially light color, but again – a little goes a LONG way. It's im-

important that you use only dye ink reinkers (water based) unless you want to stain your recipient into a nice shade of lavender or green. Since dye inks are water based they will not leave any color residue either to the bather or the tub.

Finally, it's time to mix the salts by stirring the grains so that the fragrance and color is distributed evenly within the jar. You're now ready to assemble into the packaging you choose (altered tins and baby food jars also work great) and you have a very elegant gift that literally cost only a few dollars to create.



Need a little fizzle in your bath? Erika Martin's recipe for Fizzing Bath Salts will soothe away the tension from the day leaving you refreshed and invigorated.



Fizzing Bath Salts

- 1 lb. Epsom salts;
- 1/4 cup citric acid (can be found at Wholesale Supplies Plus);
- 1/4 cup baking soda;
- 10 drops essential oil;
- (Ground herbs/flowers, and food coloring optional);
- Mix all ingredients, herb/flowers should be ground well in a coffee grinder;
- Pour into a jar, salt tube (can be found at Wholesale Supplies Plus) or Ziploc baggies.

Gifts of the Heart, for Less

Making hand-made soaps and bath salts are a great and economical way to give without putting a big pinch on your budget. But if you feel that you can't even afford to spend a little, there are several gifts of the heart that don't cost anything, but mean just as much to the receiver:

- Send an e-mail just to let someone know you are thinking of them;
- Lift someone up in prayer;
- Make a phone call for no reason, other than to just to say "hello"
- Do some computer work – update a blog background, create some digi designs for someone;
- Stamp a few images onto cardstock and send these to a friend so they can create cards with stamps they don't own.

Whether gifts come from the store, your kitchen or your heart, the kindred feelings you give will be the best reward and your kindness will be remembered long after the gifts have been forgotten.