

Yucca Soap



This history highlight is something we are all coveting right now, soap. To give an incredibly brief overview that in no way does the saponification process justice, soap is produced when animal fats or vegetable oils come into contact with an alkali, often lye, and are split into fatty acids that later combine with the sodium aspect of that alkali. In other words, you take a fat, add some chemistry, like boiling it down with ash, and voila! Soap. Soap has been with humans a very long time, dating back to at least 2800 BCE Babylon.

In New Mexico soap was historically made using "tallow" or animal fat from either domesticated sheep or hunted buffalo. The ash used to combine with the fat was often cottonwood, corncobs, or appropriately enough, ash. These kinds of soaps were more prominent during the 19th century with the influx of American immigrants coming out West via the Santa Fe Trail, and later, the railroad; but in Spanish Colonial New Mexico, most soaps were derived from something abundant and hearty, our very own state plant, the Yucca.

Yucca has certainly earned its place among state symbols as it has many prominent uses. The Pueblos used the Yucca plant to make things like mats, shoes, rope, and as it turns out, soap! Yucca root contains a component called saponin which, when combined with water, creates suds. The rich lather was used to wash hair, bodies, and wool rugs.

EL RANCHO DE LAS GOLONDRINAS

A Living History Museum

Here at Las Golondrinas our weavers still use this method when washing Churro wool before it is carded, spun, dyed and woven. At certain events you might see a demonstration or even get your hands-on history and try it yourself!

For fun and easy "squishy soap" recipes that kids will enjoy, try these sites!

<https://mamapapabubba.com/2016/02/27/awesome-diy-squishy-soap/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fGQfiEudkw>

