

Shaving soap and other stuff

1. Ingredients in shaving preparations

a. Softening the beard

Since dry beard hair is about as tough to cut as copper wire of the same diameter, a means to soften the hair must be used. Hot water alone will do this to some extent; but, some chemical help is needed. These chemicals can be natural, man-made or a combination.

They are called softeners, moisturizers, or humectants. What they do is bind, hold, combine with, or draw moisture from the air. Some are better suited for use on hair than on skin. Some examples are-

Natural:

- Allantoin (Comfrey Root)
- Aloe-Vera Gel (Liquid pressed from inner leaves)
- Apricot Extract
- Castor Oil
- Grapefruit Leaf Extract
- Hydrolyzed Whole Wheat Protein
- Olive Oil
- Papaya Extract

Man-Made:

- Lactamide MEA
- Methyl Gluceth-10
- Panthenol
- Phytantriol
- Propylene Glycol
- Retinyl Palmitate
- Sodium PCA

b. Conditioning and protecting the skin

Shaving will irritate and damage the skin. So it must be protected, conditioned, and lubricated. Some of the chemicals that soften the beard hair can also be used for the skin. Some examples are-

Natural:

- Aloe-Vera oil & gel
- Apricot Kernel Oil
- Borage Oil
- Carrot Oil
- Fractioned Coconut Oil
- Jojoba
- Kukui Nut Oil
- Rice Bran Oil
- Rosehip Seed Oil

Man-Made:

- C12-15 Alkyl Benzoate
- Caprylic Triglycerides
- Cetyl Alcohol
- Dimethicone

Glycereth-26
Methyl Gluceth- 10

Lubricants

Any shaving product with oils and conditioners will provide some lubrication. There is one material, Bentonite Clay, that is a superior lubricant. It can be used in all types of shaving products; however, it does have a problem. When used in a quantity to be effective it imparts a 'pond scum' green color. Small price to pay for a good shave.

2. Types of Shaving Products

O my, so many to choose from. Soap, Oils, creams, lotions, and stuff in cans. For the most part, all choices except soaps will be formulated from mainly man-made ingredients. This is not necessarily bad, just a cheaper, less effective product. Most will have water, binders, stabilizers, thickeners and emulsifiers as the main ingredients and are applied to the face without a brush.

If this is the type of product that you wish to use, stay with Poraso or Musgo products. These are the best of the non-brush products.

a. So what is soap?

Soap is the result of a chemical reaction between an aqueous base solution, usually Sodium Hydroxide, and fats/oils. The fats/oils are composed of fatty acids and glycerol. The end result (I spare you all the in between reactions, if interested, E-Mail me) are sodium soaps and glycerin.

If you read the ingredient list of soaps you will find such things as, sodium tallowate, sodium palmate, sodium cocoate etc. What this indicates is that the fats used to produce the soap were tallow, palm oil, and coconut oil. Unless the manufacturer makes a claim about the soap that it does something other than clean. If said to moisturize, condition or something else, then it must be labeled by Food & Drug Administration Cosmetic rules and list raw base ingredients, not end reaction ingredients. Not surprisingly, manufacturers don't want to list Sodium Hydroxide so they don't make claims.

To be effective as a shaving soap, a product should have a high percentage of castor & olive oils. By themselves they would produce a very soft soap. So coconut and/or palm oils are also used for lather stability and hardness.

b. Buy it or make it?

If you want to buy your shaving soap, try some web searches using 'castor oil' and 'shaving soap' as the search phrases. Below are a few links to soap that I have used, and my comments:

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|---|--|
| http://www.annelees.com/shavingsoap.html | very good soap if you like a Bay Rum scent |
| http://www.heavensoap.com/shavesoap.htm | not too bad, a bit drying, could use more castor oil |
| http://www.spuddie.net/shaving.htm | good soap |

If you want to make your own, there are four choices.

1. Buy a melt & pour base. This is the easiest. All you do is melt it in a double boiler and pour into a mold or mug. Many bases to choose from. A very good olive/castor oil base can be obtained from:

<http://www.brambleberry.com/supplies.html#M&P>

Just remember to get a base rich in castor oil and buy some bentonite clay to add. One tablespoon per pound. Also, adding a tablespoon of castor oil per pound is helpful.

2. Buy rebatching soap. This is a soap shred that can be melted in a plastic food bag in hot water, and then put into a mold. Two of the best are the Hemp and the Goat's Milk Rebatch Bases from:

<http://www.brambleberry.com/supplies.html#M&P>.

Cold process soap. You make this by combining an oil/fat mix with an aqueous sodium hydroxide mixture at low (usually not more than 110F) temperature. Stirring and mixing then pouring into molds.

Advantage- Complete control over the ingredients and characteristics of the soap.

Disadvantage- Working with hazardous material and waiting up to two months for the soap to completely react and cure.

3. Hot Process soap. Similar to cold process except the temperature is higher. Requires holding the mixture at high temp while stirring/mixing for perhaps several hours.

Advantage- Same as cold process except soap is completely cured & reacted in a day or two.

Disadvantage- Working with hazardous material at high temperature.

For options 1 & 2, much info is available online. For options 3 & 4, buy some books.

Brushes

You can be using the finest shaving soap; but if you have a poor brush you will not get a decent lather. The lower grade stiffer brushes will gouge out too much soap and not mix with the water. A softer brush produces a much denser lather. For the cooks, it is like trying to beat eggs or make a sauce with a spoon instead of a whisk. Generally you will find brushes sold as:

Bristle, Pure Bristle or other similar terms. These are made from hog bristle and are hard and stiff. Will gouge out soap and never produce a good lather.

Pure Badger- the lowest grade of badger bristle brush, quite a bit better than the above.

Finest Badger- much better than Pure Badger, probably the best results-to-cost choice.

Silver-Tip Badger – The best. The lather as compared to finest badger is better. But, they are usually *much* more expensive.



Pure

Finest

Silver-Tip

Use this photo to help grade a brush by appearance. Find a shop that has all choices and learn how they feel. Check the inner bristles; some brushes have quality on the outside, crap on the inside.

3. Developing a good lather

This will vary quite a bit depending on your soap, brush and water hardness. The lathers in the following photos were developed using the very hard water in my area.



Commercial Soap

Castor Oil rich soap

The above are 60x photos of lather developed by commercial and homemade soap. Notice the castor-oil rich soap has a much smaller average bubble size. This results in a lather that has a consistency close to whipped cream. The commercial soap has lather close to the consistency of lightly beaten egg whites. The larger bubbles have more unbound water and tend to run when applied to the face. Smaller bubbles indicate thicker walls and more of an oil/water emulsion.

When you apply the lather to the face, use the tip of the brush in a small circular motion. This works the lather into and around the beard hair. Don't just pick up a bit of lather and slap in onto the face. Wait a bit then start shaving.

.....How to shave will not be discussed here.....

4. After the shave

I am convinced the alcohol based after shaves were developed as a torture method during the middle ages. Who thought of this? You have just scraped some sort of sharpened metal device across your face; irritating, possibly cutting and removing cells from the top layer. Now slap alcohol on your face? I don't think so.

What is needed is something that will sooth, condition, moisturize and help heal the skin. In this case I feel only natural ingredients should be used. There are many oils and extracts that can be used. What is desired is something light, non-greasy and is readily absorbed by the skin. Examples are:

Oils

- Apricot
- Borage
- Calendula
- Carrot
- Emu

Evening Primrose
Flax Seed
Fractionated Coconut
Grapeseed
Jojoba
Kukui Nut
Pumpkin Seed
Rice Bran
Rosehip
Virgin Coconut
Watermelon Seed
Wheatgerm

Liquids

Aloe-Vera Gel 1:1

Vegetable Butters (used to add body to a lotion)

Apricot Kernel
Mango
Sweet Almond

Essential Oils (healing & conditioning properties)

Carrot seed
Myrrh
Sandalwood
Tea Tree

Other Stuff

Hydrogenated Jojoba (adds body and the benefits of Jojoba)
Grapefruit Seed Extract (preservative)

Good luck finding a commercial product that has any of these. Most have water as the main ingredient. I am not aware of any products that have more than a trace amount of any beneficial ingredients.

What to do.

Make your own or search the web for a soap & lotion maker. I looked for a long time and found nothing. That is how I got started making my own.

My after-shave is made from:

Oils:

Borage
Carrot
Fractionated Coconut
Kukui Nut
Rice Bran
Virgin Coconut

Liquid

Aloe-Vera Gel

Other Stuff

Hydrogenated Jojoba
Grapefruit Seed Extract

Essential Oils

Tea Tree

I do not use any water; the aloe-vera gel is used as the water phase.

All of the above are my opinions about soap, brushes & after-shave. As concerns opinions, there are two schools of thought:

Opinions are like ***holes, everyone has one

Or

I am the world's foremost expert on my opinion

Have fun shaving; just use the best razors and products you can find.

Bill
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