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EC55-1109 Soaps and other Detergents

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SOAPS
AND
Other Detergents

EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE
AND U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COOPERATING
W. V. LAMBERT, DIRECTOR

Soaps And Synthetic Detergents

Many of our cleaning problems have been solved, but new ones have been added. One of the modern "puzzlers" is what type of soap or other detergent to use to assure best cleaning results with the least effort. Very few types of soil can be removed by water alone, since they almost always contain some oily matter or may be acid in nature.

Soap is a familiar cleaner. But in the past five to ten years a newer cleaning agent, the synthetic detergent, has come into popular use.

Actually a detergent is anything that cleans, so technically soap is a detergent. The name "synthetic detergent" to most homemakers denotes something that is not soap. A new shorter word, "Syndet", has come into the language to describe these non-soap cleaning agents.

WHICH TO USE?

For best results with any cleaning agent, we must consider:

1. Water hardness
2. Kind of soil to be removed
3. Proper stain removal
4. Pretreatment and soaking
5. Temperature of water
6. Amount of hot water available
7. Kind of fiber or surface to be cleaned
8. Washing method

When we have determined the answers to each of these points, we are ready to select the cleaning agent. Next, study the chart below. It gives the types of soaps and syndets. Note their different performance and characteristics.

Soaps

UNBUILT SOAPS – "Pure, mild"

For:
- Handwashing & dishes
- Sheer fabrics
- Non-fast colors
- Light Soil
- Personal care

BUILT SOAPS – "Heavy Duty"

For:
- Machine washing (conventional)
- Sturdy fabrics
- Fast colors
- Heavy soil

* Require soft or softened water
* Require warm or hot water
* Causes film or scum in hard water
* Hard to rinse with hard water
* Need to soften both wash and rinse water

Syndets

UNBUILT SYNDETS - "Mild"

Dry form for:
- Handwashing & dishes
- Sheer fabrics
- Non-fast colors
- Light soil
- Personal care

Liquid form for:
- Dishes & lingerie
- Hard or soft water
- Personal care--bath, shampoo, etc.

BUILT SYNDETS - "Heavy Duty"

Sudsy type for:
- Machine washing (conventional)
- Sturdy fabrics
- Fast colors
- Heavy soil

Non-suds, low foaming type for:
- Automatic washers
- Dishwashers
- Hard or soft water
- Sturdy fabrics
- Fast colors
- Heavy soil

* Used in hard or soft water
* Cold, warm or hot water
* No hard water scum
* Rinses readily
* Less syndet than soap required in hard water
* Water softeners not required

HOW TO IDENTIFY?

Leading soap manufacturers make both soap and syndet. Often the names are the same for both products. We are obliged to study the label thoroughly in order to select the product we want.

Usually soap carton labels say "Soap", or praise the efficiency of soap.

Syndet labels often tell us there is no soap scum or hard water film; or assure us this product is "better than soap".

We can judge the built (heavy duty) versus unbuilt (mild) products by the description of the purposes for which the product is intended. When lingerie and dishes are stressed, it is an unbuilt soap or syndet; and when general laundering is recommended, it is usually a built product.

HOW MUCH TO USE?

An important factor for maximum cleaning is the use of the correct amount of either soap or syndet.

With soap, the depth and density of the suds can be the gauge. Maintain a two-inch, firm suds throughout washing period. These suds trap the dirt. Never let them break down to release the dirt back into the water and onto the articles being washed. When suds break down, it is time to change water! When articles are unusually dirty, it is best to start with a heavier suds so that the amount never goes below the two inches.

For some syndets, we can again use the depth and density of suds as an indication of sufficient quantity which is two inches. But unlike soap, the suds need not be maintained. Cleaning continues without the suds until the water becomes dirty and discolored.

For low foaming or non-suds types, we must follow the manufacturer's directions and measure accurately. Too much or too little will not clean well no matter which cleaner you use.

HARD WATER PROBLEMS

Soap combines with minerals that make water "hard". The insoluble film or curd that results is difficult to rinse out or float off. If left, it will discolor whites and dull colors.

Soils and perspiration are generally acid, and make water acid. Soap is alkaline; acid breaks it down and wastes soap. If water is hard, always soften it before adding soap; and also soften the rinse water before using it.

Syndets do not react with minerals in the water. Their effectiveness is not reduced by acid; so curd and scum are not problems in hard water. Syndets are excellent for removing body acids from garments worn next to the body, and from garments soiled with protein elements, as in eggs and milk. They are also very efficient in removing fat and grease. Often only 1/4 to 1/3 as much syndet is required as soap. Most of us use more syndet than necessary; and when we do, we must rinse more than we usually do.

Never use soap and syndet together; and never mix different brands of syndets. They counteract one another so that the cleaning power of all of them is reduced--and often entirely lost in the mixing.

Prepared by Mrs. Clara N. Leopold, Home Management Specialist, University of Nebraska, College of Agriculture, Lincoln.