



KINGS LANDING

A HISTORY LESSON ON MAKING CANDLES



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OBJECTIVE

- Learn about the history of making candles up until the late 1800s.
- Learn how folks at Kings Landing represent candle making.
- Learn to make dipped candles with modern equipment and materials.

MATERIALS

- Wicks
- Scissors
- Stick/wooden dowel
- Tall, empty food can/tin
- Wax of your choice (Beeswax, moulding wax or wax-paraffin mixture)
- Saucepan
- Water
- Stove
- Piece of cardboard
- Knife



INTRODUCTION

A candle is a useful item that provides light and warmth, helps decorate a room, and creates a cozy atmosphere. Candles can also make a room smell like flowers, baked goods, pine trees, apples, and more. While many people today use candles as decorations, they were an essential part of life before people had electricity in their homes. For the time period represented at Kings Landing, candles were a primary source of light and very important to have in every house.

This lesson focuses on the history of candles, the types of candles that existed in the 1800s, and how to make dipped candles like the villagers do at Kings Landing.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CANDLE MAKING

People have used and made candles almost as long as they've needed to see in the dark. So, basically, for forever. Candles - or objects that look like candles - have been found to exist in every almost every culture and society throughout history, including ancient Egypt and ancient Greece.

It is a common understanding by historians that the first type of candle was a stick dipped in animal fat and lit on fire. As time went on, people began to use things like reeds, rushes, and natural fibers as the wick, which is the part of the candle that burns. People also used tallow (or animal fat) and beeswax for the part of the candle that surrounds the wick. While people could get animal fat more easily, beeswax smelled better and made less of a mess.

Candle making stayed basically the same for centuries. The main things that changed were materials used to make wicks and wax. An important invention in the 1800s was the plaited wick. Jean-Jacques Cambaracres from France invented the plaited wick in 1824. Plaited means the material used, like pieces of cotton, hemp or another fiber, were twisted or braided to make a wick that burned more evenly than other kinds of wicks.

Additionally, the type of wax changed over the years. People used spermaceti candles for a long time starting around 1750. These candles were made from wax found in the oil that comes from sperm whales. While the spermaceti candle was popular because it burned brighter and kept its shape, it was quite expensive.

Around 1860, Paraffin wax became the most popular wax for candle making. This type of wax is still used to make candles today because it is colourless, odourless, clean and inexpensive. By the end of the 1800s, people made candles less often at home. The invention of the kerosene lamp in the 1850s and the light bulb in 1879 meant people did not have to rely as much on candles to see in the dark.



FUN FACT

A person who makes candles is called a chandler! Some people have the last name Chandler, which means their ancestors were from families who made and sold candles. They also often made soap because both items are made with animal fat.

Do you know any famous people with the first or last name Chandler?

CANDLE MAKING TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

In the 1800s, people followed certain rules to ensure they made the best candles that would last a long time. For example, it is best to make candles in the fall or winter. It's the time of year when people have easiest access to animal fat, and the cold weather means the candles harden easily and hold their shape. Hard candles are the best to burn as they take a long time. Households would make all the candles they need for the entire year at this time. It is also the time of year with the longest nights, so light was even more precious.

The most common ways to make candles in the time period represented at Kings Landing are by dipping the wicks or using a mold.



Dipping: This is a common method used during the time period represented at Kings Landing. The tallow is melted over the fire in a cauldron or kettle and the wicks cut into the right length to prepare to start making dipped candles. Villagers use a rod or stick and tie all the wicks to it. Each wick is dipped in the tallow with a little bit of the wick left undipped to light with fire. The wicks must cool and harden between each dip, and the process continues until the candle reaches the desired thickness. The candle makers have to ensure the tallow stays the same temperature throughout the process so it doesn't melt the layers already on the candle or spread unevenly on the wick.



Molds: Melted wax or tallow is poured into tin molds with the wick pulled through the middle. The wick must be pulled tight to ensure the wax goes around it evenly. The moulds can take days to harden inside, but putting them outside in cold weather could harden them faster. Once hardened, the molds are quickly dipped in warm water to loosen the candles. The candles are removed and left to harden for a few more days until they are ready to be used. This technique makes good quality candles and is faster to prepare, but sometimes the candles take longer to harden compared to dipped candles. You might see tin candle molds in some village homes at Kings Landing.



Once complete, the candles are kept in paper or cloth and stored in tin or wooden candle boxes. Tallow candles are especially susceptible to being eaten by critters, so these boxes are often nailed on the wall so mice cannot get inside and ruin them.

ACTIVITY - DIPPING CANDLES

In some homes at Kings Landing, you may find villagers make candles by dipping them in beeswax or tallow. Here's how you can make dipped candles at home with modern products and equipment. Make sure you get help from someone older and always keep your safety top of mind!

Adapted from the Little Craft Book Series: Candle-Making by Susanne Strose.

Materials:

- Wicks
- Scissors
- Stick/wooden dowel
- Tall, empty food can/tin
- Wax of your choice (Beeswax, moulding wax or wax-paraffin mixture)
- Saucepan
- Water
- Stove
- Piece of cardboard
- Knife

Directions:

1. Cut the candle wicks to ensure they are at least 2 inches longer than the height of the empty can. Tie the top of the wick to the stick or dowel.
2. Fill a large saucepan partially with water and place on the stove.
3. Put your wax into the empty food can.
4. Place the food can in the saucepan and turn on the heat. As the water warms, it will melt the wax. Add more wax as it melts until the fluid wax almost fills the can.
5. Once the wax is fully melted, quickly dip the wick into the wax. Make sure it does not hit the bottom of the can to prevent it from bending. Note: if the wax is too hot, it will not stick to the wick. Adjust the temperature of the water as necessary.
6. Let the wax harden. You may want to hold the wick over a piece of cardboard in case the wax drips.
7. Repeat the process of dipping and letting the wax harden until your candle reaches the thickness you want. Note: Be sure to keep the can stays nearly filled with wax to ensure the candle is the same thickness from top to bottom.
8. Let the candle cool and harden a bit, but not too much. Then, straighten the candle by rolling it back and forth in your hands or on a hard surface.
9. Finish the candle by cutting off the bottom with a warm knife and trimming the wick with scissors.
10. Find a candle holder, light your candle and enjoy the illumination it brings.

Adaptation for a large group of children: Each child stands in a line taking turns dipping and returning to the back of the line. By the time they reach the front of the line again, they will be ready to dip their candle.

Safety tip: Do not let wax touch a direct heat source as it can catch fire. If wax does catch fire, be sure to smother with a metal cover rather than water. Water should never be used to put out burning wax.



SOURCES

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