

Condom Candles

an appropriate technology cottage industry

by Conrad Bérubé

Candle molds are expensive and hand dipping is extremely time-consuming. Condoms are a commonly available item that can be used to produce attractive candles.



Making candles using condoms naturally leads to discussion of family planning and AIDS prevention. Representatives from public health units involved in AIDS education programs in Guinea expressed interest in using the activity as an ice-breaking exercise to reduce inhibitions around such discussions and the handling of condoms.

Because worker honeybees do not mate, their "chaste" behaviour was admired by Catholic monastic orders. At one time only pure beeswax candles were used in religious ceremonies of the Catholic church.

Pure beeswax candles are long-burning and produce an agreeable fragrance-- perfect for a special meal or a romantic interlude. Making free-standing candles, especially if they are tapered or cylindrical, usually requires an expensive mold or hours of tedious dipping. This pamphlet outlines how condoms can be used as a cheap alternative to pricey latex molds (a latex mold that produces a single tapered candle can cost \$60 Canadian!)

Making the candles is fairly easy—it just takes a bit of time to set up. First cut the ends off of some small cans—the type used for tomato paste work well. Cut the cans in half to produce two smaller tubes. Drive nails through the “cardinal points” about a thumb’s width from the lip of the can. Force some small sticks, of the kind used to skewer meat for barbecuing, through adjacent holes to form “stretcher handles”. These will comprise the mounts for the condoms.

Next, cut as many wicks as the number of candles you want to make (use good quality cotton string). The wicks should be about 2 inches longer than the intended length of your candles—or about 8 inches altogether. Dip the wicks into molten wax to prime them for burning and to facilitate our next work. Set these aside temporarily.

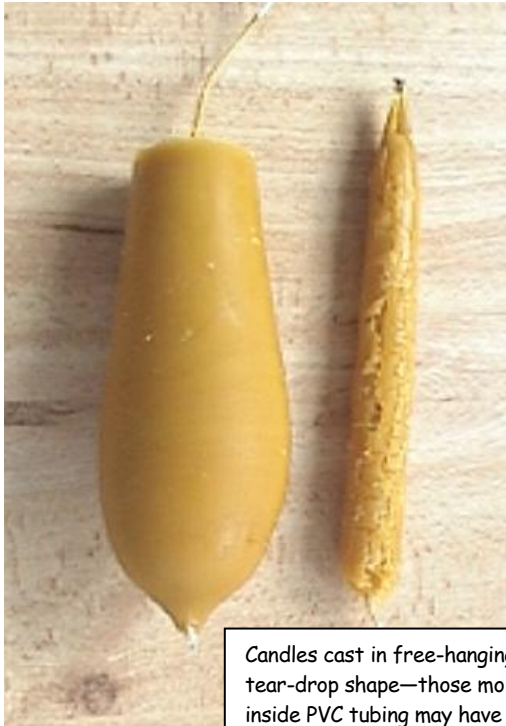


Open up the same number of condoms as you have tomato-can mounts. Feed a condom through the mouth of each of the tomato-can mounts and stretch the mouth of the condom around the can. Use string or a tight rubber band to hold the condom on the can. Thread the wick through the body of the condom and clamp or tie the tip of the wick into the reservoir tip of the condom. Set the mount across a couple of supports (beehive top-bars work well for this) laid on top of a bucket so that the condoms hang downwards (see illustration). Fill the condoms with enough wax to make an easily marketed candle. As you pour the wax into the condom it will pull downwards—stop pouring before the upper end of the wick falls below the lip of the can.

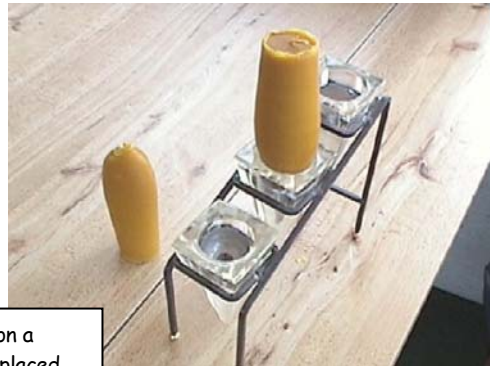
Once you have poured wax into all the condoms, lay a small stick across the top of each mount (again, small skewer sticks work well for this). Wrap the upper end of the wick around the stick and use a small dollop of warm beeswax to keep it in place or tuck the end under the rubber band and position the stick so as to keep the wick in the middle of the candle. Allow the wax to solidify (water can be added to the bucket in order to hasten solidification). Don't let the candles touch one another while solidifying as the teardrop shape will become distorted—on the other hand this property could be exploited to produce candles of different shapes by tying strings loosely around the filled condoms or allowing them to solidify inside other vessels (just make sure you can remove the candle afterwards).



Wax facts: Worker bees have four pairs of wax-glands, or wax-mirrors, located under the abdomen. These glands secrete a liquid that, upon contact with air, dries into small flakes of wax. The bees heat and soften the wax scales by chewing and use it to build or repair comb, or to seal the cells of larvae. A colony of bees needs to consume about 12 pounds of honey to produce a single pound of wax.



Once the candles are hardened remove the rubber bands from the tops of the mounts and pull the condom down through the can. Remove the clip or tie from the lower end of the wick. Gently remove the condom from the candle so that the condom may be re-used (so far I haven't had much luck in using condoms more than once—so make sure you include the cost of the condom in the cost of the candle). Trim the wicks but leave about a quarter of an inch of wick at either end so that consumers can decide in which orientation they will burn the candle.



Candles cast in free-hanging condoms take on a tear-drop shape—those molded in condoms placed inside PVC tubing may have a roughened appearance.

PVC tubing about an inch across can be used to make smaller diameter cylindrical candles. If such tubing is available, cut it into lengths just a little longer than the length desired for the candles. Run the wick into the end of the condom as before and feed the condom into the pipe. Secure the mouth of the condom across the mouth of the pipe as above and then reach up into the pipe to fish out the end. Tie the reservoir tip to the wick and to a small stick that will prevent the stretched condom from receding back into the tube. Adjust the condom so that it is stretched a bit inside the tube (if there is much slack the folds in the condom will leave deep indentations on the candle). Complete the pouring as above. If candles are rough and the texturing is considered undesirable the candles may be dipped in a deep bath of hot wax in order to give the candles a smoother finish.

Make sure to store candles in a cool place so they don't deform from the heat.



To give rough molded candles a smoother finish they can be dipped into a deep well of melted beeswax kept warm in a hot water bath. An alternative means of molding candles is through the use of a plaster of paris mold—however my experience with such molds has not proven them to be very durable.



West African technicians with whom I was working came up with another great idea for making high quality candles using the petioles from papaya leaves, readily available in most of the region—because the petioles can be easily split to remove candles in contrast to the PVC tubing no additional liner is needed to prevent leaking.)



For a related video on candle-making see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pVTa_ZxcIA or <http://www3.telus.net/conrad/bees.htm>