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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

As I put together the final layout details to this issue of L.E.T.S. Lebanon, I find it hard to believe we will soon hit our 50th issue! It's been quite a journey, but after 5 years, each issue is still an adventure in itself.

For those of you who have only just started reading L.E.T.S. Lebanon, it's only fair to tell you about its concept. L.E.T.S. stands for "Local Energy Trading System" or "Local Exchange and Trading System." Both appellations are used interchangeably and refer to non-traditional economic systems where individuals exchange products, services, or time instead of resorting to currency.

So the title L.E.T.S. Lebanon refers to our newsletter's format: authors submit to us a product (their stories and testimonies) and in exchange we give them a service (editing and publication). Of course, submissions are usually related to positive action: educating or sharing stories about growing, building, cooking, in harmony with nature. It certainly helps that L.E.T.S. Lebanon sounds the same as "Let's Lebanon."

So much for the theory. In practice, achieving this format means always scouting for new people and asking them to write about their stories or events. As the guy who handles most of the communication matters at SOILS, "Would you like to write an article for our newsletter?" is my most used sentence... my second most used sentence is "Are you done with the article yet?" In fact, I suspect my co-members at SOILS avoid telling me their news sometimes so I won't badger them about writing an article. Yeah, you know who you are, guys, you can run but you can't hide.

Still, whether the articles I get are from my "usual suspects" like *Amani* and *Karim* (who, again, generously made time in their busy schedules to write articles for this issue) or from first-timers like *Nadine* from Wootton, editing them is always an adventure.

Sometimes (vary rarely), I share articles already published on other websites or publish original articles that only require basic formatting and editing. Of course, this makes my job so much easier but, strangely, these are also the least memorable articles for me.

On the other hand, I consider it a pleasure to read those articles that find their way in my Inbox in their rawest, most honest and poetic form. The spelling- and grammar-challenged articles, the 3,000-word long reports, the dyslexic free-verse abstract poems, the indecipherable mystery hieroglyphs, the "fill-in-the-blanks" ultra-short telegrams, etc. Those are the articles I spend the most time on, trying to get into the authors' heads... and the ones I love the most.

Not everyone writes or writes "well." I used to teach writing (and I hated it) but editing articles for L.E.T.S. Lebanon is not about grading them. No, they are a window to the personalities of the people who took the time to write them. These "occasional authors" are all beautiful and unique in their own way, but they have one thing in common: They are all dreamers. They dream of triggering a reaction in people by inspiring them, raising their awareness, or simply entertaining them... in short, they dream of sharing with an audience.

And essentially, this is my dream too: to keep L.E.T.S. Lebanon a platform for sharing.

So here it is, another issue of L.E.T.S. Lebanon, brought to you by dreamers. I hope you enjoy it.

Shared by the Editor in Chief



For most of us, dreaming takes place at a messy desk behind a screen... and with enough distraction



LET'S FOCUS

A COURSE IN MAKING YOUR OWN HYGIENE PRODUCTS

ACT 1 - SOAP

There's something definitely satisfying about grabbing a bar of your own homemade soap bar under the shower. It gives you a sense of self-sufficiency, much like growing your own food or sewing your own clothes. As a matter of fact, making soap is so easy, it is hard to understand why so many people still insist on buying paraben- and chemical-laden mass-marketed soaps!

On **Saturday, August 25, 2018**, I gave a workshop on **soap-making** at **Buzuruna Juzuruna's** farm in **Saadnayel**. The main attendees were male and female Syrian refugees from surrounding camps. Everyone contributed to producing a batch of middle-sized olive oil soap bars.

We started by explaining what soap is and how it works. Soap is what you get when you mix a basic solution with fat. The basic solution can be **sodium hydroxide (NaOH)** or **potassium hydroxide (KOH)**. Both are commonly known as **lye** (in Lebanese vernacular: *atroun* - قطرون) and can be found in any hardware shop (*khardawet* - خردوات). The fat can be vegetable oil (any kind) or animal fat.

To understand how soap works, try mixing oil and water in a glass bottle... They don't mix, right? Both liquids remain separated no matter how you try to shake them or stir them together.

Now try adding a few drops of liquid soap to the bottle and shake it. The three liquids will become a single unified solution. This is the principle of soap: It attracts fat and water particles. So, technically, cleaning your body, your clothes, the dishes, or any surface with soap means dislodging all the dirt particles on your body that are hard to clean (because they are infused with oils) and then rinsing them away with water.

Of course two other factors help in the cleaning process: a) The temperature of water. The hotter it is, the faster it will act, and b) The mechanical action of scrubbing. The stronger you scrub the faster the fat will be dislodged.

Adding essential oils to soap can impart additional health benefits to it. Soap containing **tea tree oil (*Melaleuca alternifolia*)**, for example, has strong anti-fungal properties. **Peppermint oil (*Mentha balsamea*)** mixed with **Chinese cinnamon (*Cinnamomum cassia*)** can lend their revitalizing virtues to soap, etc.

Although the internet contains many recipes that include mixing different kinds of oils or fats chosen for their moisturizing virtues, we decided to use the traditional **Levantine olive oil recipe** as its ingredients are easily accessible to Syrian refugees in the Bekaa.

There are two techniques for making soap: **either a cold or a hot process**. The cold process has the advantage of providing smoother and more refined shapes but the soap takes at least 3 months of curing before being ready for use. The hot process provides less manipulable shapes but can be ready in 2 days.

We demonstrated both processes during the workshop. Here are the ingredients and tools we used to make around 30 middle-sized soaps (we used half the quantities in each process):

- Olive oil: 1.5 liters
- Lye (sodium hydroxide): 200 grams
- Distilled water: 0.5 liters
- Essential oil (optional): 6 milliliters (we choose thyme essential oil)
- Gloves
- Goggles
- A face mask (to avoid breathing in dangerous fumes)
- A wooden spatula
- 2 cooking pots (1 for each of the hot and cold processes)
- Different moulds (silicone moulds for baking cupcakes work fine)

COLD-PROCESS SOAP

First put on the gloves, mask, and goggles. Pour the water into a pot, then gradually add the lye. Be careful, the mixture will heat up very fast so it is important to do it slowly while stirring continuously. Always follow this order and never put the lye first then add water to it.

Once the mixture is homogeneous, add the oil in. Stir for around 15 minutes until you get a slightly thick and homogeneous paste. Add in the essential oil. You can now pour this mixture into your moulds and leave them in a dry cool place. After 2 or 3 days, unmould your soaps and leave them to "cure" for at least 2-3 months for "saponification" to conclude (meaning the complete synthesis of the oil, lye, and water particles).

Attention: If you use your soap before it is fully cured, the unprocessed lye could cause burns and leave marks on your skin.

That's how easy it is to make soap!

HOT-PROCESS SOAP

Basically, follow the same steps as in the cold process to mix the water, lye, and oil. Once you have a paste, put your cooking pot on the stove at low heat for about 45 minutes.

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Heating the mixture accelerates saponification. During heating, the mixture goes through three stages. Stage 1: After 15 minutes, the oil will separate from the mixture. Stir the mixture until it is homogeneous again then cover the pot and leave it at low heat. Stage 2: After another 15 minutes, your mixture will become bubbly. Stir it again, then cover the pot and leave it at low heat. Stage 3: After another 15 minutes, the mixture should reach the consistency of Vaseline and you can turn off the heat. Add the essential oil and let the mixture cool down for 5 minutes then pour it into your moulds with a spatula.

Only 2 days later, your soap is ready to use.

The hot process is just as easy as the cold one but it can sometimes be tricky... During my workshop, while the soap was cooking in its second stage, someone had the bright idea to remove the pot from the stove so he could prepare tea for everyone! This ruined our hot process soap! When we discovered the pot was removed, the oil had separated from the mixture again and there was no way of getting everything back together. We ended up with little deformed oil-coated dry balls that wouldn't stick together. 2 days later, these balls literally fell apart in our hands. At least everyone learned that hot-process soap should never be removed from the fire before it has reached its Vaseline consistency.

Despite this, we had a lot of fun and the cold-process soaps turned out great. We are now waiting for their saponification to be complete so we can enjoy using them.

Shared by Karim Hakim

ACT 2 - TOOTHPASTE AND DEODORANT

During this session, we also taught the participants how to make simple and natural products such as toothpaste and deodorant. Again, several studies showed that commercial products contain active ingredients which cause harmful side effects and health issues for humans: aluminum and paraben in deodorants, and fluoride and sodium dodecyl sulfate in toothpaste.

Luckily, there are simple and effective recipes you can prepare at home to substitute store-bought products.

NATURAL HOME-MADE TOOTHPASTE

To make your own toothpaste you will need 3-5 minutes and the following ingredients:

- Certified organic coconut oil: 45 ml (3 Tbsps)
- Baking soda: 45 ml (3 Tbsps)
- Salt: 1 tsp
- Essential oil (optional): 5 drops
- Stevia (optional): 1 pinch

Coconut oil naturally fights the fungal infection *candida* in your mouth. It also helps to reduce the bacteria that cause cavities and boost the microbiome in your gut. Baking soda's alkalinity helps balance pH levels in the mouth. It is also a mild abrasive. Sea salt remove stains and whitens the teeth. High-mineral salts like Himalayan pink salt may also help to remineralize teeth. Essential oils are a good way to mask flavors while adding nicer ones, plus they offer additional benefits: clove oil (*Eugenia caryophyllata*) is antibacterial; peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*) is rich in minerals, strengthens the enamel of the teeth, and is a familiar flavor for toothpaste; cinnamon oil (*Cinnamomum verum* or *Cinnamomum cassia*) fights inflammation, basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) stops gum bleeding and protects teeth from decay. Stevia is a natural sweetening ingredient that improves the toothpaste's taste.

Place the coconut oil in a separate container inside a bowl of hot water to liquefy it (depending on your room temperature, this may take up to 15 minutes). Add the remaining ingredients to the coconut oil and stir until you end up with a paste-like consistency.

Store the finished product in a lidded glass jar. The quantities listed above yield around 60 ml of toothpaste and have a shelf life of 3-6 months.

To use your toothpaste, apply about a ½ teaspoon onto your brush. The paste will liquefy almost immediately when put it into your mouth, so there is no need to add water.

Note: If it's as cold in your house as it is in ours right now, you may need to warm the toothpaste a bit before using it.

NATURAL HOME-MADE DEODORANT

To make your own deodorant you will need 3-5 minutes and the following ingredients:

- Baking soda: 1/4 cup
- Cornstarch: 1/4 cup
- Coconut oil: 5 Tbsps
- Essential oil (optional): 5-10 drops

Coconut oil has antibacterial properties which will naturally stop the odor and leave you smelling fresh. Baking soda absorbs perspiration and neutralizes odors. Cornstarch absorbs and traps moisture. Essential oils offer additional benefits. You can use tea tree oil or lavender oil.

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Mix the baking soda and cornstarch together in a bowl. Add the coconut oil. Mix well. You can also add essential oils for a more noticeable scent.

Store the finished product in a lidded glass jar away from direct sunlight. The quantities listed above yield around 110 gm of deodorant and have a shelf life of 3-6 months.

To use your deodorant, take a small amount and rub it between your hands to soften it then apply it under your arms like a lotion.

Again, if it's cold, you may need to warm the coconut oil up a bit before using it.

Attention: If you feel a rash when using this deodorant, this means you are sensitive to baking soda and should stop using it.

Shared by Amani Dagher



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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

WOOTTON: PURITY OF FORM AND CONTENT

My passion for weaving homeware items from natural materials was born out of need; the need to de-stress, revitalize, and create. I started at square one by teaching myself **weaving** and experimenting with it. Soon, my trials and errors became a source of fun. Finally, I learned patience and attained peace.

I had always liked shaping my own surroundings. When I felt confident enough in my new skill, I decided to create an experimental mood-setter to inject into the space I spend most of my days in. I opted for a rug that would be warm and heartwarming, soft to both the touch and the soul. The end result was a piece that I find essential for my space and comfortable to have around. The creation didn't stop here, I explored more techniques of **crochet**, **macramé**, **sewing**, and **weaving** from which more and more products were born under the homeware concept. Each outcome was its own reward, and I soon started to enhance and embellish my pieces with more details. After that, I felt I needed to give the pieces in my growing collection new homes. They would make new spaces homier by matching the personality and taste of their new owners.

And so, in **2017**, **Wootton** was born. The name is a combination of "wool" and "cotton," pure materials that communicate with clarity and honesty. I work with natural materials to make use of what the earth offers us, away from plastic and chemicals, which inspires trust in my products when people come in contact with them. I respect and believe in the power of nature to teach us and help us. When you work with natural products this way you are in harmony with nature. I mostly use natural organic materials, mainly cotton (including recycled cotton) and merino sheep wool, which are remarkably soft and gentle on the skin, as well as jute and banana leaves.

In addition, every Wootton creation is designed to cater to different tastes and needs. I customize the ideal colors and shapes to set the right mood to suit the personality of person or place. In a nutshell, every piece is unique.

Although Wootton began some time ago, I really started making my creations visible recently. I started selling my products through social media and at Souk el Tayeb. In the coming period, I will increase my collaboration with other local artists and designers to showcase my products on their platforms (such as Luanatic's online gallery).

I hope that Wootton can help create a mind shift in favor of organic living and sustainability so more people can appreciate the treasure that the earth is giving us. I would like to maintain high quality standards with respect to the natural materials I use. I'm constantly on the lookout for the best options around me. I'm proud to say that some of the material I use is sourced in Lebanon to encourage local production and manufacturers. But sometimes, it is impossible to find certain materials like recycled cotton and pure wool locally, so I look for trusted suppliers abroad.

My aim through Wootton is to play an active role in growing the Lebanese crafting community. I want to collaborate with other creators and help build a network of individuals who learn to value art, nature, and positivity.

Shared by Nadine Helwi

Photos courtesy of Wootton.

You can check out the Wootton existing collection or order your own customized items on:

Facebook: [Wootton \(facebook.com/woottoncreation\)](https://www.facebook.com/woottoncreation)

Instagram: [Wootton Creation \(instagram.com/wootton_creation\)](https://www.instagram.com/wootton_creation)



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LET'S SHARE OUR NEWS

THE CONTROVERSY OVER HUNTING IN LEBANON: SO WE DON'T LOSE OUR COMPASS

Barely a week after the opening of the **2018-2019 hunting season** [Editor's note: from September 1, 2018 to February 15, 2019], images of massacred birds of prey and other protected and endangered birds were already flooding social networking sites in Lebanon.

The criminals responsible for these massacres are irresponsible hunters who broke the law in all its forms simply to show off their "heroism" to their fellow criminals. In the wake of these massacres, some environmental associations are pressuring the **Minister of Environment** to invite the **Higher Council of Wild Hunting** to hold a meeting and come up with a plan that ensures the Hunting Law is applied, or suspend the hunting season.

Suspending the hunting season means depriving responsible hunters of the hobby they love after they complied with the law and paid their license renewal fees - because of the crimes of "trigger-happy shooters and poachers," the shortfalls of the responsible authorities, and the shortsightedness of some environmental associations.

Today, we see a great rift between hunters and environmental activists. Some environmental associations do not differentiate between good and bad hunters, while hunters do not differentiate between associations that work hard to protect endangered birds and others that seek only material gain. This rift is the result of the failure of the responsible security authorities to strictly enforce the Hunting Law, for example by prosecuting violators and banning hunting nets or night hunting.

The only way out is for environmental activists and responsible hunters to cooperate with the environmental prosecutors and the political, security, and military apparatuses to restore the standing of hunting while sustaining natural and bird life in Lebanon.

Shared by Fouad Itani

This article was originally published on the Sayd Magazine website:
<http://www.sayd-magazine.com/4982/>



All photos from Sayd Magazine's website and Facebook page

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A THOUGHT TO SHARE ...

"Like music and art, love of nature is a common language that can transcend political or social boundaries."



-Jimmy Carter (1924-)

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SAVE PAPER – Do you really need to print this newsletter?

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