

THE TRADITIONAL INCENSE CRAFTING COURSE

from The Northwest School of Aromatic Medicine

Homework - Module 6

Crafting Incense Sticks

From loose incense, to cones, to sticks! This homework is a lot of people's favorite. We've come a long way and you've tried your hand at different formulation techniques and have hopefully made yourself a few different amazing blends of loose incense and incense cones. Now I'd like to challenge you a bit more and have you create your very own incense sticks!

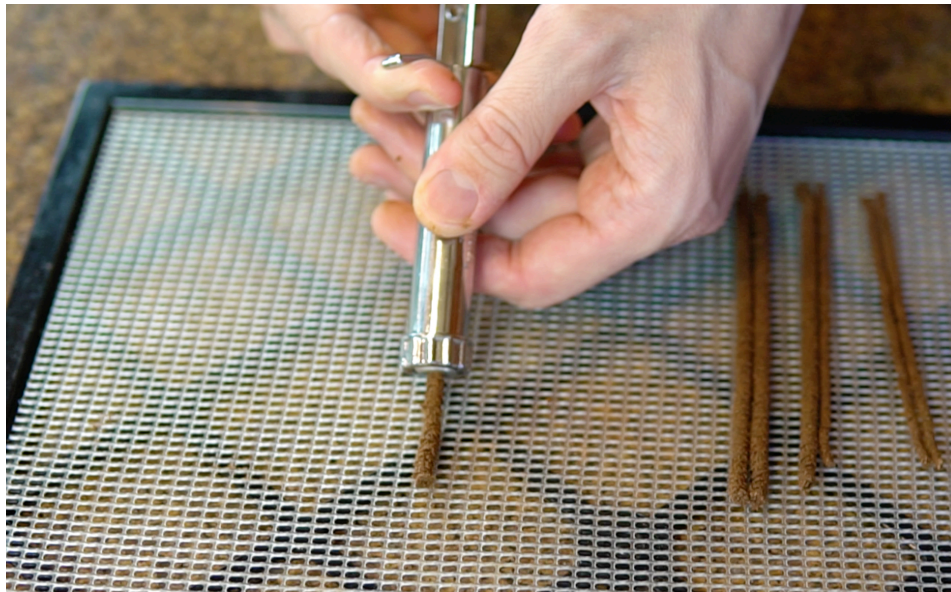
I suggest formulating a new blend for this homework assignment, but you can also use the formula you created for your incense cone blend, or try your hand at one of the recipes I've given you along with this video. And if you have a desire to add essential oils to your incense, be sure to read the handout, "Adding Essential Oils to Incense."



Steps to Take:

1. Choose your intention and ingredients for your incense stick formula and start grinding and powdering your materials. Then start creating your formula.
2. In terms of material ratios for sticks, it's the same as it is for cones. I suggest for your first few batches to start out using 3 parts base materials to 1 part other aromatic ingredients. Once you make more batches of incense and gain more experience with incense ingredients, you can start playing around with your ratios. A 1 to 3 is a great ratio for beginners. Also, be careful not to add too much binder: always start with a lower quantity and add as needed during your testing phase. You can get an idea of binder quantities for sticks from this video or the sample recipes in this module.
3. Make 3-7, or more, variations of your formula and test them along the way by burning them in their dry powder form prior to adding binder or liquids to them. Have a burning incense charcoal ready during formulation for testing.
4. Once you have a solid formula that you like, mix a larger batch of ingredients well and add your powdered binder. Mix well again. Then add your wetting agent and mix thoroughly one last time.
5. Infuse your prayers, positive intentions, songs, mantras, positive thoughts, etc. into your incense.
6. Knead your dough for a few minutes to get your plant materials to 'open up' to one another and begin mingling and harmonizing together. When your kneaded dough has the consistency of wet or very damp clay and no longer sticks to your fingers, and starts adhering to itself instead, you can start extruding it into sticks. You can also allow your dough to cure for a few hours or overnight in the fridge prior to extruding to bring out its aromatics. Soaking your base powders overnight or curing your complete mixed batch of ingredients (wet and dry) can also sometimes make the surface of your sticks smoother and less rough when exuded depending on your ingredients.
7. Once you're done kneading or curing, your dough is ready for the extruder. Pack your extruder (syringe or clay gun) with dough, position it so its back end is toward you and its tip is away from you (see photo below). Then touching its tip to your surface (wooden board, wax paper, parchment paper, or cardboard) at a 30 degree angle, slowly press out the dough while moving the extruder towards you slowly, creating 4 - 7 inch sticks. If you have a clay gun you can play around with different size extruder heads to get different thicknesses in your sticks to see what you like best. Usually dhoop sticks are the same thickness as a cellphone or laptop charger chord when they're dry.

You usually don't want anything thicker than a pen or pencil; which is considered very thick and usually harder to burn. Japanese style sticks are very thin and delicate; the thinnest sticks in the world. They're usually thinner than a piece of yarn (I've even seen them as thin as a toothpick). Remember, your sticks will shrink in thickness significantly so be sure to extrude them in a larger size to make up for this! If your sticks are coming out of the extruder looking flaky or breaking as you extrude, your recipe likely needs more water or binder to help them become more smooth. Simply add a bit of either or both of these in, knead, and try again. It can also help in this case to soak your base powders in water overnight before you add them to your other ingredients.



8. Once formed, dry your sticks on your flat surface, screen, or baking rack; in the open air, dehydrator, oven, or whatever means you wish. Slow dry for best results. Roll your sticks 180 degrees every hour or two for even drying and to prevent curving. Slow drying may take anywhere from 15 to 52 hours depending on moisture, thickness, ingredients, etc. Dehydrator may take anywhere from 1 to 4 hours depending on these same factors.
9. Once they're dry they're ready to burn. Alternately, you can choose to cure your sticks in a glass jar or unglazed earthenware for a few weeks or months. They must be completely dry *before* curing. Place a piece of chalk or unglazed dry clay in your curing container to help absorb any moisture if you are uncertain of the moisture content.
10. Wipe the sweat from your brow and enjoy!