

To Pollute or Not to Pollute: Making the Correct Candle Choice

As candle lovers, choosing a candle was easy when all you had to decide was which color or scent appealed the most. Now, there is another growing trend to consider, are the candles in the market place safe for the environment? When soy and palm wax candles are set side by side they both have a lot in common such as being vegetable based, burn clean especially when cotton core wicks are used in the manufacturing of the candle, and hold scents well. However, of these candle types, one stands out as a truly Eco-friendly choice.



Soy candle manufacturers advertise how buying soy helps support American farmers and is organic but there is a lot they are not telling the public. Based on a study in 2009 by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) 77.5 million acres of land in the United States was used for growing soybeans, making it the second largest crop in the US next to corn. With such large scale production, soy farmers rely on genetically modified (GM) soybeans specifically developed to withstand

toxins such as pesticides. Mark Edwards, a writer for thegazette.com, found, “two-thirds of Iowa’s 36 million acres (the top producing state for soy) are drowning in chemicals for just two annual plants — corn and soybeans.” The use of GM soybeans gives farmers the ability use more pesticides to ensure bumper crops. The use of pesticides and other chemicals in the farming of soy has been linked to over-cultivation of soil leading to soil erosion, groundwater contamination, and runoff making its way to rivers and streams further damaging aquatic ecosystems.

Alternatively, palm oil (what palm wax is derived from) is harvested from berry-like fruit bunches from the palm oil tree, a perennial raised on palm tree plantations. What makes palm oil unique is that the trees grow for decades and the fruit reaches maturity several times a year. On these plantations native grasses and vegetation are encouraged to repopulate between trees encouraging wild boar, monkeys, and other wildlife to roam in and out of the plantations, just as they do in the wild. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides are rarely, if ever, used.

The process which each soy and palm wax is refined is also environmentally different. Palm oil is steam-distilled, without the use of chemicals, and then hardened with the help of chilling and spinning the oil, a process that also does not require any non-organic substances or harmful chemicals. Processing soy starts with the use of hexane or other volatile petroleum based solvent. Next is the bleaching process which removes color, and then vacuum distillation is used to remove free fatty acids, odor, color pigments to produce a bland oil. With these chemicals necessary to produce soy wax, it is misleading for soy candle makers to call their candles "organic", "100% natural", or even eco-friendly.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, perhaps hard facts speak millions. It takes consumers who realize that one candle can save the world to cause a ripple effect showing big businesses that candle lovers will only support those who care about the environment and the health of their consumers. Candle lovers deserve to know the about different kinds of waxes, especially what makes it Eco-friendly. Candle manufacturers who cut corners are counting on uneducated consumers to help line their pockets, because the truth will most likely ruin them. Be educated and the correct candle choice.

The author, Michelle Sholund, is the owner of By the Bay Botanicals (www.bythebaybotanicals.com). It is a small retail and wholesale business that specializes in several types of naturally scented gifts handmade in Maryland out of a 1930's farmhouse. By the Bay Botanicals is also a proud partner of The Chesapeake Bay Trust.