



LIGHT IT



Candles from Scratch

Gather old cans, containers, and half-used candles to make brilliant, new light. BY LEAH PETERSON

You don't need expensive equipment to make your own candles at home. You can use a variety of containers with smooth sides for molds, including thick plastic or metal measuring cups and muffin tins. An old pancake hot plate and cleaned food cans make a great double boiler. Just remember that whatever you use will most likely be covered in wax and not a good candidate for food use afterwards. Paraffin wax can be purchased at craft stores in large blocks, but you can also use old candle leftovers.



Materials

- » **Molds or reusable candle containers**
- » **Hot plate**
- » **Empty food cans** 16 ounces or larger
- » **Wick-centering sticks**
- » **Candle scents** (optional)
- » **Wax** new or used
- » **Measuring cup**
- » **Scissors**
- » **Dull knife**
- » **Heavy pliers or oven mitt**
- » **Long-handled spoon**
- » **Long-handled Phillips screwdriver**
- » **Small Phillips screwdriver**
- » **Mold screws**
- » **Mold sealer**
- » **Metal core wick and wick tabs**
- » **Wax dye**
- » **Hammer** (optional)

* TIPS

- » Never pour used water down a sink drain after candle making — instead, discard the water on a dirt patch in the yard.
- » Never leave melting wax unattended. Flash points for wax vary by type. Keep the temperature below 210°F to avoid a fire hazard.
- » The water in the hot plate should never boil. If bubbles begin to form, turn the temperature down immediately by at least 5°, otherwise a can could overturn. When the water is the correct temperature, you should see a slight bit of steam and a few slow, small bubbles rising to the top.
- » If you do accidentally spill hot wax on an uncovered surface, don't disturb it until it's cooled completely. Large sections of cold wax are much easier to clean up with a dull blade than warm wax that has been smeared thinly.
- » You can coat the candle mold interior with a small amount of cooking spray. Use a paper towel to rub the inside, and make sure the coating is even and thin. Bubbles or puddles of spray will leave pockets in the wax.
- » Reuse non-metal candle containers by putting them in the microwave for 15 seconds at a time. Use a blunt knife and a paper towel to wipe softened wax residue in between turns.

Before starting, cover every work surface with thick plastic — a few layers of trash bags will work.

1. Melt the wax.

Wash the metal food cans, one for each color. Break large pieces of wax into smaller chunks (to melt faster). Use a hammer if necessary. When recycling candles, remove old wicks and labels as completely as possible. Weigh the cans down with wax chips, then fill the hot plate with water, about $\frac{3}{4}$ " from the top. Heat the water to 210°F.

2. Prepare the molds.

While the wax melts, get the molds ready. When choosing a wick, consider the diameter of the mold. Use thinner wicks for votives, and thicker wicks for larger molds. If the container is very wide, you can use a couple of wicks placed a few inches apart. Wicks with metal cores can be easier to work with since they are stiffer and straighter. Cut the wicks a few inches longer than the molds.

For votives or reusable containers, insert the wick into the metal wick tab, and crimp with pliers. Store-bought metal molds come with a small hole drilled into the bottom, where the wick will be pushed through. Use a small screw, available with candle supplies, to tighten and hold the wick on the outside. Use mold sealer to completely seal around the

screw and wick poking out of the end. This will be the finished candle's top.

3. Color your candles.

Add dye after all the wax chips have melted. You can make endless combinations with red, yellow, and blue. White is also helpful to soften a color and make it creamy-looking. If desired, add a few drops or chips of candle scent right before pouring.

4. Pour the wax.

Use pliers or oven mitts to hold the cans. When lifting the cans, do not drip water into the other cans of wax. You can also use a measuring cup to fill the molds. Fill the molds to about $\frac{1}{4}$ " below the rim. Save some wax for topping off. After filling the molds, lower the hot plate to just under 200°F.

Deep or wide molds need a wick-centering stick. Use the stick to hold the wick in the center after pouring. Tying the wick around a pencil also works. Use metal-core wicks for votives and small molds. Wait 60–90 seconds after pouring, then use a long Phillips screwdriver to center the wick. Press down firmly to stick the wick to the slightly cooler wax on the bottom of the mold.

5. Top off the candles.

Smaller and thinner molds cool quickly. Wax will

