



Children's Lives at Colonial London Town: The Stories of Three Families

Forego the Fetid Odors: Discover the Function and Fragrance of a Sweet Bag

Use the “5-E Science Model” to Discover which Ingredients Make the Most Effective Sweet Bag

Setting the Scene – A Brief Background of the Sweet Bag

Imagine you have woken up in your home at London Town. Some of the first things you might have smelled would have included: the fire in your room (depending on the season) or the fire in the kitchen, breakfast cooking, and, if your room happened to have a window, and it was near the garbage pit, you would have encountered the stench from that too. You probably shared the bed and room with others so the chamber pot was quite full and in need of emptying. Yes, odors were certainly plentiful during a colonial morning. Remember, too, that you did not bathe or shower on a regular basis because it was not common practice. It wasn't until later that society became aware that hygiene (and cleanliness) helped keep one healthy.

For centuries people had relied on herbs and plants for their sweet, welcome scent. Ground, crushed plants were combined and strategically placed on floors, in bedding, in chests of drawers with clothing, and in fabric to provide pleasant aromas. In the colonial period, people tied crushed plants into a square of linen, cotton or another breathable, natural fabric that they carried with them; this allowed them to enjoy their pleasant smell and offset offensive odors.

Take a moment to discuss the kinds of plants and herbs that you and your family members enjoy. Do you know whether any of these plants or herbs were historically used in sweet bags?



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View and discuss the following original receipts (recipes) for making a sweet bag. Do you recognize any of the plants in the receipts? If so, why do you think it/they were included in the receipt?

To make a Sweet-Bag for Linen.

TAKE a pound of orrice-roots, a pound of sweet calamus, a pound of cyprefs-roots, a pound of dried lemon-peel, a pound of dried orange-peel, a peck of dried roses, make all these into a gross powder; coriander-seed four ounces, nutmegs one ounce and half, an ounce of cloves; make all these into fine powder, and mix with the other; add musk and ambergrease; then take four large handfuls of lavender-flowers dried and rubb'd, a handful of sweet marjoram, a handful of orange-leaves, a handful of young walnut-leaves, all dry'd and rubb'd; mix all together, with some bits of cotton perfum'd with essences, and put it up into silk bags to lay with your linen.

Source: *The Compleat Housewife: or, Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion*, by E. Smith (1739)

Sweet-scented Bags to lay with Linen.—At One Shilling and Sixpence, Two Shillings and Sixpence, &c. &c. &c. each Bag.

EIGHT ounces of coriander-seeds, eight ounces of sweet orrice-root, eight ounces of damask-rose leaves, eight ounces of calamus-aromaticus, one ounce of mace, one ounce of cinnamon, half an ounce of cloves, four drachms of musk-powder, two drachms of white loaf-sugar, three ounces of lavender-flowers, and some Rhodium wood; beat them well together, and make them in small silk bags.

Source: *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*, by Hannah Glasse (1784)



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This activity uses the 5-E Learning Model, an inquiry process to learn about a topic.

The steps in the *5-E Learning Model* are:

Engagement	Learner has a need to know, therefore, defines questions, issues or problems that relate to his/her world.
Exploration <i>(Investigate)</i>	Learner gathers, organizes, interprets, analyzes, evaluates data
Explanation <i>(Clarification)</i>	Learner clarifies understandings discovered, reaches conclusions or generalizations, and communicates in varying modes and forms.
Elaboration <i>(Expands)</i>	Learner applies these conclusions or generalizations to solve problems, make decisions, perform tasks, resolve conflicts or make meaning
Evaluation	Students assess their knowledge, skills, and abilities. Activities permit evaluation of student development and lesson effectiveness.

Your task is to follow the steps below, using the 5-E Learning Model, to determine which ingredients in the sweet bag are longest lasting, and therefore, the most effective.

Engagement: Compare the ingredients in each colonial receipt. Which sweet bag receipt do you believe will be the most effective at providing long lasting pleasant odors?

If you are not familiar with the plants listed in the receipts, take the time to collect the ingredients, as some time with the plants will help to inform your prediction. You will need the ingredients in order to conduct research and compare both sweet bag receipts.

Exploration: After both sweet bags are prepared according to their original colonial receipts, your family needs to make a plan for how you will conduct the experiment and collect data. As a team create a table or document that will collect your data and make sure you know who will record the data and when.

Exploration is on-going until the experiment is complete. The team members should be informed about the experiment and whether there are any changes or differences between the sweet bags.



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Explanation: After the exploration phase is completed, the team should return to the data and add this topic, titled “Explanation,” as a new column. Draw conclusions and generalizations about what the data reveals.

Elaboration: With your team’s conclusions and generalizations in mind, think about why both authors selected the plants that they did. What did the authors know about the plants they chose? Do you or any team members feel that you would add more of a particular plant/herb and if so, why? Do you or any team members have an ingredient in mind that you think should be added to the next sweet bag you make? Why or why not?

Modern day use of potpourri (which has a long history of its own) is similar to sweet bags. Is there a location in your house that could use a sweet bag, sachet or potpourri?

Evaluation: Revisit and reflect on the original question you and your team discussed. Compare the ingredients in each colonial receipt. Which sweet bag receipt do you believe will be the most effective at providing long lasting pleasant odors? Now that you’ve conducted research, gathered and interpreted data, and have drawn conclusions about the plants and herbs that are the most effective at providing pleasant aromas, in what ways does this knowledge help you understand the function of herbs in historical eras and how can this knowledge help you in your life today? Discuss as a team.

Extension:

1. Other sweet bag receipts call for plants such as rosemary, pinks, mint, myrtle, and angelica root. You may want to conduct a third experiment that allows you to incorporate 1 or more of the plants listed and see whether they present a different outcome that could change the ingredients you feel are most effective in sweet bags.
2. Visit London Town and share your findings with the staff at London Town. Share your findings with others, too. Consider using a similar experiment for a Science Fair Project.