



CANDLES

People all over the world have used candles for a long time. 2000 years ago, some Native Americans burned a “candlefish” to see at night. Better ways to make candles appeared when people began to burn the fat from animals.

You need two things to make a candle: a wick, and a source of fuel. The best wicks are made from strands of cotton twisted together to look like string. This wick is then covered with a material that burns slowly. Tallow, a kind of animal fat, was used first. Tallow candles smelled bad and were smoky. Some people used beeswax, but it was very expensive. About 1880, French scientists discovered stearin. It burned without smoking and with no odor. Stearin candles quickly replaced tallow candles.

Around 1850, paraffin was mixed with stearin to make a better candle. It burned brightly, did not smell bad, and was cheap to make. This mixture is still used to make candles today.

Electric lights soon replaced candles. Now, candles are popular decorations for special events like holidays and birthdays. How would we celebrate Christmas or Hanukkah or Kwanza without candles? What would a birthday cake be without candles?