

Oil That Washes Away Oil: Saponification

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Slippery oils like cooking oil or lard are hard to wash off no matter how much water you use. Yet if you mix this oil with a strong alkaline solution and stir it, over time it turns into soap that strips away greasy grime. In other words, the oil becomes the very substance that washes oil away. There is a chemical reaction that turns oil into soap in this way. It is called 'saponification.' Put simply, saponification is a reaction in which a substance called an ester meets an aqueous alkaline solution such as sodium hydroxide and splits into a carboxylate salt and an alcohol. The name comes fr