How Handcrafted Shea Butter is Made

The journey begins when the fallen shea fruit is gathered and brought home. At this point, resourcefulness comes into play as chickens are allowed to pick at the remaining fruit on the husks, ensuring that nothing goes to waste. Any lingering fruit is parboiled, and the husks are meticulously dried on cement surfaces. Once dried and sorted, the triple A quality nuts make their way to the crushing mill, where they undergo roasting to coax out the precious oils that make shea butter.

Following roasting, the shea nuts are spread out on cement to cool before returning to the mill for a second grinding, resulting in a viscous substance nearly ready to become shea butter. Water is skillfully kneaded into the shea paste to achieve the ideal consistency, facilitating the coagulation of oils into shea butter.

Drying the seeds

The drying process for the seeds involves a series of steps. Chickens help extract any remaining fruit from the husks, and what’s left is boiled to remove remaining flesh and sterilize the seeds. The nutrient-rich water from this process is repurposed to nourish community gardens and plants. The husks, when dried, are spread on clean surfaces, carefully monitored during the rainy season to ensure they remain unaffected by rainstorms, which could impede the drying process or compromise the quality of the shea nuts.

Turning the dried seeds into shea paste is a meticulous process. After thorough washing and sorting, the seeds are dried once more. Certified organic seeds are dried on cement or tarps to prevent contamination. Any subpar nuts are removed and used as fuel. The meticulously dried and sorted triple A

quality nuts are loaded into large basins, each weighing over 60 pounds or 30 kilograms, and carried atop the women’s heads to the crushing mill.

Grinding and roasting

Traditionally, shea nuts were crushed by hand using a large mortar and pestle. Now, a grinding mill streamlines this task, transforming the nuts into a coarse grind, preparing them for roasting. The roasting process, often fueled by discarded husks and shea nuts, is conducted safely with specially designed roasters, allowing the women to sit away from the fire and operate a hand crank, making the work more manageable and eliminating proximity to the flames.

Making Shea Butter

To create shea butter, the ground nuts are kneaded with water in a delicate process, adding just enough to achieve the perfect consistency for whipping and coagulating the shea oils. As more water is incorporated, the coagulated shea oils rise to the surface, while water and solids separate, resulting in a fluffy whitish mass. Once impurities are carefully removed, the finished shea butter is strained, covered, and left to cool and solidify before packing for shipment.

Every part of this process contributes to sustainability and resourcefulness. The shells protecting the seeds are used for cooking fires, the residue from whipped shea nuts is formed into cooking balls, and impurities skimmed from the top are repurposed to create black soap and fuel for lanterns. Baraka’s commitment to a circular economy ensures that nothing goes to waste in this remarkable journey from shea nut to shea butter.