

How is seaside rock made?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Seaside rock is one of the few sweets in Britain that is still made almost entirely by hand. The machinery in a rock kitchen does the heavy lifting, but the colours, the lettering and the rolling are all down to the maker.

It starts with sugar and glucose

Traditional rock uses granulated sugar and glucose syrup, mixed at about three parts sugar to one part glucose, with water to dissolve it. The glucose stops the sugar from crystallising again, which is what keeps rock glassy and hard rather than grainy.

The mixture is boiled in a large pan, often copper, to around 147°C. Sugar makers call this the hard crack stage: a drop of the syrup snaps cleanly when it cools. Rock makers often work in Fahrenheit, which is why you will hear them talk about boiling to roughly 300 degrees.

Cooling on the table

The hot syrup is tipped out onto steel tables cooled by running water underneath. As it cools it forms a skin on the bottom and becomes a thick, heavy slab that the maker keeps turning so it cools evenly.

At this point the batch is split. Some of it is coloured for the outer casing and the letters, usually pink or red for the outside. The colours are worked in by hand with a palette knife, and the coloured pieces are cut with large shears.

Pulling makes the white

The rest of the slab goes onto a pulling machine. It has one fixed arm and two moving arms that turn in opposite directions, stretching and folding the sugar over and over. That folding traps tiny bubbles of air, and the clear golden sugar turns into the soft white that forms the middle of the stick. The flavouring, usually peppermint, is worked in at this stage.

Building the letters

The lettering is the part that surprises most people. Each letter is built by hand from thin strips of coloured and white sugar, laid side by side like building blocks. The finished letters start out roughly the size of a 2p coin, far bigger than they end up. There is a whole article on this: [how they get the letters in rock](#).

The letters are lined up in spelling order with strips of white between them, the white centre is packed around them, and the coloured casing is rolled out and wrapped around the whole thing. What you have now is a fat cylinder of warm sugar, much bigger than a stick of rock.

Rolling out the sticks

The cylinder goes into a batch roller, a machine with tapered rollers and heaters that keeps the sugar soft enough to work. From there the maker spins it out into a long rope, and as the rope gets thinner the letters inside shrink with it, keeping their shape all the way through.

The rope is laid on a long flat table and kept rolling until it sets hard enough to hold its round shape, then cut to length with shears. A normal stick is 20 to 25 cm long. Once cool, each stick is wrapped in clear cellophane with a paper label.

Why it takes years to learn

Everything happens while the sugar is hot and the clock is ticking, because it only stays workable for a short time. Showtown, Blackpool's museum of fun and entertainment, notes that a rock roller can take up to ten years to fully learn the trade. Once you know what goes into a single stick, that is not hard to believe.

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