

Aniseed balls

From the sweeties.net wiki

Aniseed balls are small, hard, round sweets with a shiny, dark reddish brown coat and a strong aniseed flavour. They are sold in Britain, Ireland, Malta, South Africa, Canada, New Zealand and Australia, and they have a reputation for lasting a very long time.

What are aniseed balls?

An aniseed ball is a comfit: a sweet made by building up layers of sugar around a tiny centre. They are usually about 13 mm across, which is half an inch, and as hard as a gobstopper. The flavour comes from aniseed oil, and they are made to be sucked slowly rather than crunched.

The seed in the middle

At the very centre there is usually a single whole rapeseed. It is there to give the sugar something to build around, layer after layer, until the ball reaches full size. Some makers use a sugar crystal instead. It is the same idea as a [gobstopper](#), just smaller, and you can see how that works in [how gobstoppers are made](#).

Where the flavour comes from

Anise is a flowering plant native to the eastern Mediterranean and southwest Asia, and the small dried fruits it produces are what we call aniseed. Its flavour is often compared with liquorice, fennel and star anise. Most of the essential oil in aniseed is a compound called anethole, and anethole is what gives anise its smell and taste. British aniseed balls get a mention as a classic use of the spice, alongside black jelly beans and aniseed twists.

Aniseed is not liquorice

The two get muddled all the time, but they come from different plants. Anise belongs to the same family as carrots and fennel, while liquorice is the root of *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, a flowering plant in the bean family. More in [is aniseed the same as liquorice?](#)

A secret wartime job

In 1939, a magnetic limpet mine for underwater sabotage was being built in Britain. It needed a delay, so the saboteur could get away before it went off. The answer was an aniseed ball, placed between the spring loaded striker and the detonator. Every ball was the same shape and dissolved in water in about 35 minutes. The full story is in [the wartime aniseed ball timer](#).

Buy them loose

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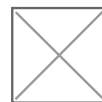
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