

Barley sugar

From the sweeties.net wiki

Barley sugar is a traditional boiled sweet, usually yellow or orange, with a clear, glassy look. In Britain it has usually been sold as twisted sticks, and it is one of the oldest boiled sweets still made.

What is barley sugar?

The traditional recipe boils sugar with barley water, which gives barley sugar its particular taste and golden colour. It is very close to hard caramel sweets in texture and taste, and to clear toy candy, which is made the same way with plain water. Like other boiled sweets, it is almost entirely sugar once it has set.

Does it actually contain barley?

Not always. A recipe from 1723 boils barley in water, strains it and adds the liquid to sugar cooked to caramel. But by the 1800s most published recipes for barley sugar left the barley out altogether, using sugar with lemon, water, egg white or cream of tartar instead. Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management, from 1861, used egg white and suggested saffron for colour.

Some modern makers still make barley sweets with no barley and synthetic flavourings. In the United States, the Food and Drug Administration discourages calling a sweet barley sugar unless it really contains barley.

Two ways to make it

There is no single recipe. Heating sugar to 160 °C makes it melt and then set with a cloudy surface as sugar crystals form. Heating it further, to 185 °C, gives a thick liquid that stays clear if it is cooled quickly. Both have been sold as barley sugar. You can read more in [how barley sugar is made](#).

From a French convent

The first barley sugar recipe is credited to Elizabeth Pidoux, the first Mother Superior of the Benedictine nuns at Moret sur Loing in France, who combined sugar and barley water in 1638 while experimenting with remedies. Their version was sold as little tetrahedral sweets stamped with a heart, a cross and the letters RM. For how it is made, see [how is barley sugar made?](#)

Barley twist furniture

Barley sugar was also made into small spiral sticks, and the shape was so familiar that it lent its name to twisted columns, spiral furniture legs and twisted stair spindles. If you have ever heard of barley twist legs on a table, that is where the name comes from.

A London favourite

In Victorian London, a sweet maker recalled that barley sugar and acid drops had once been the only boiled sweets the old city confectioners made. For more boiled sweets, see [what boiled sweets are](#) and [butterscotch](#).

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