

How Smarties inspired M&M's

From the sweeties.net wiki

Put a Smartie next to an M&M and the family resemblance is obvious: milk chocolate inside a crunchy, coloured sugar shell. That is not a coincidence.

Smarties came first

Rowntree's of York had been making Chocolate Beans since at least 1882. In 1937 they renamed them Smarties Chocolate Beans, soon just Smarties, and began selling them in cardboard tubes after testing the idea in Scotland. They came in eight colours, and until 1958 the dark brown ones had dark chocolate centres while the light brown ones tasted of coffee.

A soldier's sweet

Chocolate in a hard sugar shell had one big advantage: it did not melt in the hand. According to the usual account, Forrest Mars, the son of the founder of Mars, saw soldiers in the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s eating Smarties. It was exactly the kind of chocolate an army could carry.

M&M's

Back in America, Forrest went into partnership with Bruce Murrie, son of the president of the rival Hershey Chocolate Company, who took a 20 percent share. The two Ms stand for Mars and Murrie. Mars received a patent for his process on 3 March 1941, and M&M's went into production that year. The Hershey link mattered: chocolate was rationed in the United States at the time and Hershey controlled supplies, so the deal meant the sweets could be made with Hershey chocolate. Murrie sold his share to Mars in 1949. The sugar shell gave M&M's their line about melting in your mouth, not in your hand.

The deal that shared out the world

You might expect Rowntree's to have sued. According to Nestlé's archives, it did not. Instead, after long negotiations, George Harris of Rowntree's and Forrest Mars agreed to share the market rather than fight over it. A 1947 agreement kept Smarties out of the United States, where they would have competed with M&M's. In return, Rowntree's got the right to make Mars bars for Canada, Ireland and South Africa.

That is why, to this day, you cannot walk into an American shop and buy Rowntree's style Smarties: in the US the name Smarties belongs to a completely different sweet, a hard tablet candy with no chocolate at all.

What happened next

Rowntree's was bought by Nestlé in 1988. In a campaign against that takeover, blue Smarties replaced the light brown ones, with badges reading I Support Blue Smarties. British production of Smarties ended in

2007, when it moved from York to Hamburg in Germany. M&M's, meanwhile, are sold in more than 100 countries. Both are made the same basic way, by coating chocolate centres in revolving pans: see [what sugar panning is](#).

Earn rewards on [sweeties.net](#)

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



[sweeties.net](#) · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@sweeties.net · 3-click cancel at [sweeties.net/cancel/](#)