

Slab toffee and the toffee hammer

From the sweeties.net wiki

For generations, hard toffee in Britain did not come in neat wrappers. It came in slabs, and the sweet shop broke it up with a tiny hammer.

How slab toffee was sold

Hard toffee was poured out into a flat sheet and left to set. In the shop, the slab was broken with a small hammer and the pieces weighed out by the quarter. Walker's Nonsuch, the toffee makers of Longton in Stoke on Trent, describe how local people came to their founder's little sweet shop in the late 19th century to buy his slab toffee, broken with a special hammer and served by the quarter. The company says its toffee and its famous little hammers are still the hallmarks of the business.

The toffee hammer

A toffee hammer is a very small hammer made for breaking sheets or slabs of hard toffee into bite sized pieces. Toffee makers still include them as a novelty in gift packs, and the name is sometimes used for any unusually small hammer, from surgical tools to scaffolders' hammers.

The toffee hammer also has a place in political history: in the early 20th century, suffragettes used them to break windows in their campaign for votes for women. See [the toffee hammer and the suffragettes](#).

Bonfire toffee and the hammer

The hammer is especially linked with bonfire toffee, also called treacle toffee. By the mid 1950s bonfire toffee was often made in large sheets, with pieces broken off with a toffee hammer, although some people discouraged the practice over food safety worries. Today treacle toffee in specialist sweet shops is usually broken by hand and wrapped in paper, or sold in sheets for breaking up at home. See [treacle toffee](#).

How to break slab toffee

- Keep the toffee in its tray or on a board, with a clean tea towel over it to stop shards flying.
- Tap firmly in the middle with the hammer; it will crack along natural lines.
- Keep going until the pieces are a size you like.
- Store the pieces in an airtight tin, because toffee, like all sugar sweets, softens and goes sticky in damp air.

Slab toffee is a small piece of theatre as well as a sweet. For a maker that still does it, see [Walker's Nonsuch toffee](#).

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