

Why is liquorice called Spanish?

From the sweeties.net wiki

In parts of the north of England, liquorice has another name. Ask for Spanish, or a bit of Spanish, and you will be given liquorice. The name comes with not one but two stories.

Where it is called Spanish

Liquorice is colloquially known as Spanish in Cumbria, County Durham, Yorkshire and Lancashire. Wiktionary records the word as a colloquial Northern England name for liquorice.

The monks of Rievaulx

The first story is that the name comes from monks. According to this account, Spanish monks grew liquorice root at Rievaulx Abbey, near Thirsk in North Yorkshire, and the name Spanish stuck to the plant and the sweet made from it. The sources describe this as what supposedly happened, so it is best treated as a story rather than proven history.

The Armada legend

The second story comes from Pontefract, the Yorkshire town most closely linked with liquorice. According to a local legend recorded by Wiktionary, twigs that washed up from the wreck of a Spanish Armada galleon turned out to be liquorice roots, and so liquorice became Spanish. It is a good tale, though it is a legend rather than history.

Liquorice and Pontefract

Whichever story you prefer, the link between liquorice and the north is real. Pontefract in Yorkshire is where liquorice mixed with sugar began to be used as a sweet in the modern way, and it is where Pontefract cakes were first made. The liquorice plant is no longer grown there, though in 2012 a local farmer announced he would reintroduce a liquorice crop, and the town still has a liquorice sweet industry and holds a liquorice festival every year. See [Pontefract cakes](#).

What liquorice is

Liquorice is the root of *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, a flowering plant of the bean family, native to West Asia, tropical Asia, North Africa and southern Europe. A sweet, aromatic flavouring is extracted from the root. The word liquorice comes, through Anglo French and Late Latin, from the Greek *glykyrrhiza*, meaning sweet root. In Italy, Spain and France the root itself is still harvested, washed, dried and chewed.

In many liquorice flavoured sweets the taste is boosted with aniseed oil, so the actual amount of liquorice is quite low. For a liquorice mixture, see [Liquorice Allsorts](#), and for more regional sweet words, see [what](#)

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