

Why is sherbet called kali?

From the sweeties.net wiki

In parts of the north of England, the fizzy powder most of the country calls sherbet has another name: kali. It is one of those words that can tell you where someone grew up.

What kali is

Lists of northern food words give kali simply as sherbet. Wiktionary describes it a little more precisely, as a British crystalline sweet similar in appearance to sherbet but made with larger sugar crystals. Either way, it is the same kind of sweet: a sugary powder that fizzes on your tongue, eaten by dipping a lollipop or a liquorice stick into it, or straight off a finger.

Where the name may come from

The honest answer is that nobody knows for certain. Wiktionary gives the origin of kali, in this sense, as uncertain, and suggests it may refer to the appearance of soda ash, which was made by burning a plant called kali. That plant is the prickly glasswort, also known by the Latin name *Salsola kali*.

The word kali itself comes from Arabic, *qily*, and it is the same word you can see in alkali. Soda ash is sodium carbonate, and sodium carbonate is one of the alkaline ingredients that can be used to make sherbet fizz.

Why sherbet fizzes

Sherbet in the UK is a mixture of sugar, flavouring, an edible acid and an edible base. The acid may be tartaric, citric or malic acid, and the base may be bicarbonate of soda, sodium carbonate or magnesium carbonate. Dry, they do nothing. The moment they meet moisture, such as saliva, the acid and the base react and give off carbon dioxide gas, which is the fizz.

Sherbet before sweets

Sherbet was not always a sweet. In 1816 John Richards of the Strand, in London, claimed to have invented a portable sherbet powder to stir into water for a sparkling drink, and sherbet powders were used to make fizzy drinks before canned drinks became common. The word sherbet itself comes, through Turkish and Persian, from the Arabic for a drink.

Kali today

You will still find sherbet in plenty of old sweets: sherbet fountains, flying saucers and sherbet lemons, the last two both in our pick and mix. See [Sherbet Fountains](#), [flying saucers](#) and [sherbet lemons](#). For other northern names for sweets, see [what people call sweets around Britain](#).

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