

# What is carnauba wax on sweets?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Carnauba wax is a natural wax taken from the leaves of the carnauba palm, a tree that grows only in north east Brazil. On sweets it is a glazing agent: a very thin coating that gives them a shine and stops them sticking to each other. On an ingredients list it appears as carnauba wax or by its E number, E903.

## Where it comes from

The carnauba palm, *Copernicia prunifera*, grows in the Brazilian states of Ceará, Piauí, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Rio Grande do Norte, Maranhão and Bahia, and Piauí is the biggest producer of the wax in the world. The wax coats the palm's leaves. The leaves are cut, dried and beaten to loosen the wax, which is then refined and bleached. In its pure state it comes as hard, yellow brown flakes.

It is also called Brazil wax or palm wax, and its nickname is the queen of waxes. It is one of the hardest natural waxes, and it melts at 82 to 86 degrees Celsius, one of the highest melting points of any natural wax and well above beeswax, which melts at 62 to 64 degrees.

## Why it is on sweets

The glossy finish that makes carnauba useful in car wax, shoe polish and furniture polish also makes it useful on food. Jelly beans usually contain a little edible wax, such as carnauba wax or beeswax, and a German documentary in 2017 explained that the carnauba wax on Haribo's gold bears makes them shine and stops them sticking together. Carnauba wax is also used to coat chocolate covered bakery products, snacks, nuts and coffee beans, and on the surface of fresh fruit.

Because it comes from a plant, carnauba wax is suitable for vegans and vegetarians, unlike beeswax and shellac, which are also used to glaze sweets: see [what is beeswax on sweets?](#) and [what is shellac on sweets?](#)

## Is it safe?

Carnauba wax is an approved food additive. In 2012 the European Food Safety Authority looked at it again and concluded that its use at the authorised levels would not be of safety concern. It did not set an acceptable daily intake, because long term studies were lacking, but it found the amounts people eat left a sufficient margin of safety.

## The scandal behind the shine

Carnauba has a darker side. In October 2017 a German television documentary in the ARD series *Markencheck* looked at where the carnauba wax on Haribo's gold bears came from and followed it to plantations in Brazil. Reporters found workers with no toilets and no clean drinking water, some sleeping in

trucks, some of them under age, and paid about 40 reais a day. An official from Brazil's labour ministry said the conditions could be described as slavery.

Haribo said such conditions were unacceptable and that it was extremely concerned. It promised a prompt audit of its suppliers, including the suppliers of its direct suppliers, right back to single farms.

The problem did not go away. In 2024 the BBC reported that Brazilian officials had rescued 114 workers from carnauba plantations the year before. The harvest is heavy manual work, done with hand tools in the heat of the north east, and the industry supports around half a million Brazilians. In 2016 Brazil's labour ministry had asked the five biggest wax processors to sign an agreement to clean up their supply chains, but the BBC found that the informal way much of the trade works makes it very hard to trace wax back to the companies that finally use it.

Some of the industry is trying to change. In 2018 the Initiative for Responsible Carnauba was set up with local manufacturers, international distributors and brands, to set social, traceability and biodiversity standards and help producers meet them.

For how glazes appear on an ingredients list, see [what is glazing agent in sweets?](#)

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