

What is glazing agent in sweets?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Glazing agent is an entry found on many bags of sweets. It means the sweets have been given a very thin coating that makes them shine and protects them. In nature, waxes keep moisture inside plants and insects, and food makers borrow the same idea: a glaze helps stop a sweet losing water, which helps it keep longer, and gives it a smooth, glossy finish.

What the label tells you

Under European labelling rules, a food additive is listed in the ingredients by its category, followed by its name or its E number. That is why a bag of sweets might say glazing agent: carnauba wax, or glazing agents: beeswax, carnauba wax. The category tells you what the additive is doing, and the name tells you what it is.

The natural glazes

Natural glazing agents include these four.

- **Beeswax, E901.** The wax honey bees make to build their honeycomb. See [what is beeswax on sweets?](#)
- **Candelilla wax, E902.** A wax from the leaves of the small candelilla shrub of northern Mexico and the south western United States. It can be used in place of carnauba wax or beeswax, and one of its major uses is as a binder in chewing gum.
- **Carnauba wax, E903.** From the leaves of the carnauba palm in north east Brazil. It is hard and glossy, and it is used on gummy sweets and jelly beans. See [what is carnauba wax on sweets?](#)
- **Shellac, E904.** A resin secreted by the lac bug in India and Thailand, also sold as confectioner's glaze. See [what is shellac on sweets?](#)

Glazes can be combined. Jelly Belly, for example, finishes its jelly beans with shellac and beeswax, and Haribo has used carnauba wax to make its gold bears shine and stop them sticking together.

Why sweets need a glaze

A glazing agent has a few jobs. It protects the sweet from spoiling and from losing water, which can give it a longer shelf life. It has to stay stable under pressure and heat, and it has to spread evenly into a smooth layer. And it gives the sweet its shine.

On gummy sweets the glaze also keeps each piece separate, so they do not stick together in one lump in the bag.

Vegan or not

The glaze matters if you are vegan. Beeswax is made by bees and shellac comes from an insect, so both are on the list of additives vegans avoid, along with the red colour cochineal. Carnauba wax and candelilla wax come from plants, and zein, a protein from maize, is used as a plant based alternative to shellac. So if a sweet is sold as vegan, its glaze should be one of the plant ones: see [what sweets are vegan in the UK?](#)

Are they safe?

Glazing agents are approved food additives. The European Food Safety Authority concluded in 2012 that carnauba wax at the authorised levels was not a safety concern, and in 2024 it set an acceptable daily intake for shellac. Beeswax is edible, with negligible toxicity, although your body cannot digest it.

For more on the numbers that follow the names, see [what are E numbers in sweets?](#)

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