

Is aniseed the same as liquorice?

From the sweeties.net wiki

No, aniseed and liquorice are not the same thing. They come from two unrelated plants. But they taste so alike that sweet makers use one to stand in for the other, and many sweets that taste of liquorice contain little or no liquorice at all.

Two different plants

Aniseed is the seed of anise, *Pimpinella anisum*, a small annual plant that grows to about 60 to 90 centimetres, with white or yellow flowers in clusters. Strictly, what we call aniseed is the plant's small dry fruit. Anise belongs to the family Apiaceae, the same family as carrots. It is native to the eastern Mediterranean and south west Asia and was first cultivated in the Middle East. It has been grown in Egypt for around 4,000 years.

Liquorice is the root of *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, a perennial plant of the bean family, native to West Asia, North Africa and southern Europe: see [is liquorice a root?](#)

So one is a seed and the other is a root, from plants in quite different families.

Why they taste the same

The link is a flavour compound called anethole. It is the most powerful flavour in the essential oil of anise, and it is also part of the scent of liquorice root. That shared compound is why anise is said to taste like liquorice, and why its flavour is often described as similar to fennel and tarragon too.

There is one big difference. Much of liquorice's sweetness comes from glycyrrhizin, a compound 30 to 50 times sweeter than sugar, which anise does not have. Liquorice also brings its dark colour: see [why is black liquorice black?](#)

Aniseed in liquorice sweets

Because aniseed tastes so much like liquorice, it is used to strengthen the flavour of liquorice sweets. In most liquorice sweets, the taste is reinforced by aniseed oil, so the actual liquorice content is low. Some liquorice sweets use anise oil instead of liquorice extract, or as well as it.

Some British sweets are aniseed rather than liquorice:

- **Aniseed balls**, the hard, dark reddish brown sweets flavoured with aniseed oil, which traditionally have a rapeseed at the centre: see [aniseed balls](#)
- **Black Jacks**, which are labelled as an aniseed flavour chew: see [Black Jacks](#)

- **Black jelly beans**, which are often marketed as liquorice flavoured but are among the sweets flavoured with anise

And then there is star anise

To complicate things further, there is a third plant. Star anise, *Illicium verum*, is a spice from South China. It is not related to anise, but it contains the same anethole. Star anise is much cheaper to produce and has gradually replaced true anise in Western markets: by 1999, the world produced 8 tons of anise essential oil against 400 tons from star anise.

Aniseed in a glass

Anise is also the flavour behind many drinks, including ouzo, sambuca, pastis and raki. These drinks are clear, but turn cloudy when water is added, an effect known as the ouzo effect.

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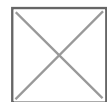
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