

What is the difference between sherbet and sorbet?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Sherbet and sorbet sound alike because they are, in a sense, the same word. But depending on where you are, sherbet can mean a fizzy powder, a frozen pudding or a drink, and sorbet is something else again.

Three meanings

- **British sherbet** is a fizzy sweet powder, eaten with a lolly, a liquorice stick or a finger. It contains sugar, flavouring, an edible acid and a base that react on your tongue: see [what is sherbet made of?](#)
- **American sherbet** is a frozen dessert made from water, sugar, a dairy product such as milk or cream, and a flavouring, usually fruit. It has 1 to 2 per cent milkfat, much less than ice cream. In the United States, commercial sherbet is defined in federal regulations as a frozen product containing one or more optional dairy products.
- **Sorbet** is a frozen dessert of ice with fruit juice, fruit purée or other flavourings, such as wine, liqueur or honey. The key difference from American sherbet is that sorbet has no dairy, which makes it similar to Italian ice.

In parts of Europe, sherbet can also still mean a flavoured drink.

One word, many roads

All of these meanings go back to the Arabic verb *shariba*, to drink. From it came the Persian *sharbat*, meaning a drink.

The word then travelled by two routes. One went through Turkish *şerbet* into English as sherbet. The other went through Italian, where the first Western mention of sherbet was a reference to something the Turks drank, and the word became *sorbetto*, later sorbet in French and then in English.

From drink to dessert

Both sherbet and sorbet started as drinks and became something cold. When Europeans learned to freeze sherbet, they began making sorbetto by adding fruit juices and flavourings to a frozen syrup. The first French recipe for flavoured ices appeared in 1674, and Italian recipes for sorbetti were printed in 1694. After refrigeration developed, a frozen form of the drink evolved into the dessert with dairy mixed in, and it was promoted during the Second World War because it used milk at a time when cream was scarce.

In Britain, sherbet went a different way. In the 19th century it was sold as a powder to stir into water for a fizzy drink, and it gradually became the fizzy powder sold as a sweet today: see [why is sherbet called kali?](#)

Rainbow sherbet

One American sherbet has a story of its own. Rainbow sherbet, with three flavours and colours in one scoop, was invented in the 1950s at Sealtest Dairy in Pennsylvania, after an employee came up with a nozzle that let out three flavours at once.

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