

# What are boiled sweets?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Boiled sweets are the hard sweets you suck rather than chew. In the United States they are called hard candy. Wiktionary defines a boiled sweet as a hard sweet, made by boiling sugar, which gradually dissolves when sucked, and that is exactly what they are.

## How they are made

A boiled sweet starts as a sugar syrup, made from sucrose, glucose or other sugars dissolved in water. The syrup is boiled until almost all the water has gone, at temperatures of around 145 to 160 degrees Celsius. Then the sweet maker takes it off the heat and may add citric acid, colour and flavouring, such as a plant extract or an essential oil. The thick syrup is poured into moulds or onto a cooling table, and when it is cool enough to handle it can be folded, rolled or moulded into shape. As it approaches room temperature, it becomes stiff and brittle.

Humbugs show how it is done. A mixture of sugar, glycerine, colour and flavouring is heated to about 145 degrees, poured out, stretched and folded many times. The stripes come from a smaller piece of coloured mixture folded into the main batch, and the mixture is then rolled into a long, thin cylinder and sliced.

## Almost pure sugar

Most boiled sweets are nearly 100 per cent sugar by weight, with only a tiny amount of flavour and colour and almost no water. Their sugar is not arranged in crystals. It sets in a jumbled, glassy state, about 98 per cent or more solid sugar, which is why a boiled sweet is hard and smooth rather than grainy, and why it snaps rather than bends: see [why is seaside rock so hard?](#)

## The boiled sweet family

Boiled sweets come in many forms. Stick sweets such as candy canes and rock, lollipops and aniseed twists are all boiled sweets. British examples include:

- **Barley sugar**, a traditional boiled sweet, often yellow or orange, usually made with barley water and, in Britain, sold as twisted sticks: see [barley sugar](#)
- **Humbugs**, usually peppermint and striped in two colours, recorded from as early as the 1820s: see [humbugs](#)
- **Pear drops**, half pink and half yellow, with a flavour from the fruity smelling chemicals isoamyl acetate and ethyl acetate: see [pear drops](#)
- **Sherbet lemons**, with a fizzy sherbet centre: see [sherbet lemons](#)

## Medical roots

Boiled sweets have medical roots. In early European history, apothecaries made most sugar preparations, and many used sugar candy to make their prescriptions easier to take. One Middle Eastern remedy for colds and fevers was little twisted sticks of pulled sugar, which became known in England as penidia or penids. They were the ancestors of barley sugar and modern cough drops, and in 1390 the treasurer of the Earl of Derby listed penydes among his provisions for expeditions to Prussia and the Holy Land. Hard sweets have long been associated with cough drops.

## Keeping them hard

Because they are almost pure sugar, boiled sweets pull moisture from the air and go sticky if they are left unwrapped: see [why does seaside rock go soft?](#)

We sell pear drops, rhubarb and custard, sherbet lemons, kola cubes and pineapple chunks, all boiled sweets, in our pick and mix.

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