

Why are boiled sweets called boiled sweets?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Boiled sweets are called boiled sweets because of how they are made: by boiling a sugar syrup. Wiktionary puts it simply, defining a boiled sweet as a hard sweet, made by boiling sugar, which gradually dissolves when sucked. In American English the same sweets are called hard candy.

What really boils

A boiled sweet starts as sugar dissolved in water. When that syrup is heated, it is the water that boils and turns to steam. As the water boils away, the syrup gets more concentrated and its temperature climbs. When the sweet maker stops at the right point, the syrup is so low in water that it sets hard as it cools.

The sugar itself is not boiled. Sucrose, ordinary sugar, only melts fully at about 186 degrees Celsius, and heating it further breaks it down into glucose and fructose before it could ever boil. So boiled sweet is, strictly speaking, a misnomer: it is the water that boils, not the sugar.

Why the temperature matters

The temperature a sugar syrup reaches tells a sweet maker how much water is left in it, and so how hard the finished sweet will be. Confectioners use names for the stages along the way.

- **Soft ball.** Fudge is heated to the soft ball stage. Below about 116 degrees Celsius, fudge will not set properly.
- **Hard crack.** Seaside rock is boiled to about 147 degrees Celsius, the hard crack stage, and sugar glass, the fake glass used in films, is heated to at least about 150 degrees.
- **Hard candy.** Many boiled sweets are made from syrups heated to around 160 degrees Celsius.

At the hard end, the finished sweet is nearly 100 per cent sugar, with almost no water left. Its sugar sets in a jumbled, glassy state rather than as crystals, which makes it hard and brittle: see [why is seaside rock so hard?](#)

Boiled, then shaped

Once the syrup comes off the heat, colour, flavour and sometimes citric acid are added, and the thick syrup is poured into moulds or onto a cooling table. While it is still warm it can be folded, pulled, rolled or moulded, which is how sweets like humbugs, rock and barley sugar twists get their shapes and stripes: see [what are boiled sweets?](#)

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