

Natural colours in sweets

From the sweeties.net wiki

Food colours can be natural, such as carotenoids and anthocyanins extracted from plants or cochineal from insects, or synthetic, such as tartrazine yellow. Sweets have used both, and natural colourings have been on the rise.

The natural palette

- **Blue: spirulina.** A blue green alga whose pigment, phycocyanin, gives a natural blue. Blue Smarties returned in 2008 coloured with spirulina: see [what is spirulina doing in my sweets?](#)
- **Red, pink and purple: anthocyanins.** The pigments of red and purple plants, used from sources such as black carrot concentrate: see [what is black carrot concentrate?](#)
- **Yellow: curcumin.** The colour of turmeric, a member of the ginger family, which has the E number E100.
- **Orange and red: paprika extract.** Carotenoids extracted from paprika peppers.
- **Red and pink: beetroot red.** Betanin and related pigments from beetroot, which have a long history as a food colouring in Europe.
- **Deep red: carmine.** Made from cochineal insects, with the E number E120. It is not vegan: see [what is carmine?](#)

A published ingredients list for Bassett's Jelly Babies, for example, gives colours from plant sources such as anthocyanins, paprika extract and curcumin.

Colouring foods and E numbers

Natural colours reach the label in two ways:

- **As additives with E numbers**, such as curcumin, E100, or carmine, E120, when the colour has been extracted and purified.
- **As colouring foods**, listed as ordinary ingredients. Under European guidance adopted in 2013, which came into force in November 2015, colours made from foods without selectively extracting the pigment, such as spirulina concentrate or black carrot concentrate, count as colouring foods rather than additives.

That is why a sweet can be brightly coloured and still have no colour E numbers on the pack: see [what are E numbers in sweets?](#)

Synthetic colours and the Southampton study

In 2007 the Southampton study linked six synthetic colours to hyperactivity in some children. Sweets containing those colours must now carry a warning that they may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children: see [why do some sweets have a warning about children?](#) Trade reports in 2016 described natural food colourings as on the rise.

The trade offs

Natural colours have their limits. Spirulina's blue, for example, fades at high temperatures.

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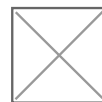
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