

How is barley sugar made?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Barley sugar is a golden boiled sweet, traditionally twisted into sticks: see [barley sugar](#). The name covers several recipes and at least two cooking methods, so there is no single way to make it. Here is how it has been made over nearly four centuries.

The convent recipe

The most traditional barley sugar is the French sucre d'orge. Its first recipe is credited to Elizabeth Pidoux, the first Mother Superior of the Benedictine nuns at Moret sur Loing, who combined sugar and barley water in 1638 while experimenting with remedies. This 17th century barley sugar was made by boiling down refined cane sugar with barley water and water. Sucre d'orge from Moret was often sold as boxes of small tetrahedral sweets marked with a heart, a cross and the letters RM, and it was also made into small spiral sticks: see [barley sugar](#)

An English method from 1723

A cookery book published in 1723 set out the method like this:

1. **Make barley water.** Boil barley in water and strain it through a hair sieve.
2. **Cook the sugar.** Add the liquid to clarified sugar boiled to caramel height, the last degree of boiling.
3. **Settle.** Take the pan off the heat and let the boiling settle.
4. **Pour.** Pour the syrup onto a marble slab rubbed with olive oil.
5. **Shape.** As it cools and begins to grow hard, cut it into pieces and roll them into lengths.

Barley sugar without barley

By the 1800s most published recipes left the barley out. In 1829 the Italian Confectioner made barley sugar twists, tablets and drops with sugar, lemon, vinegar or alum, and whatever flavouring the maker chose. An 1850 recipe used sugar, water and lemon, and an 1880 recipe sugar, water and egg white. Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management, in 1861, used egg white and suggested saffron for colour. A modern recipe uses sugar, water, lemon and cream of tartar.

Cream of tartar is an acid. With heat, it breaks some of the sucrose down into glucose and fructose, which helps stop sugar crystals forming, so the syrup sets smooth and shiny rather than grainy. The American maker Timberlake Candies drew a line between barley sugar made with cream of tartar and barley candy made with corn syrup, which gives a harder, clearer sweet.

Clear or cloudy

As the US Food and Drug Administration has noted, at least two distinct methods have been used to make sweets called barley sugar. Heating sugar to 160°C makes it melt and then set, turning opaque on the surface as sugar crystals form. Heating it to 185°C gives a thick, sticky liquid which, if it is cooled suddenly, stays transparent: see [how are boiled sweets made?](#)

The same science is used to make sugar glass: glucose syrup or cream of tartar stops the sugar recrystallising and turning opaque. Because the result draws moisture from the air, it softens if it is left out: see [why does seaside rock go soft?](#)

Moulded barley sugar

In the 18th century metal moulds began to be used to make shaped sweets, known both as barley sugar and as clear toy candy. By the 19th century these moulded sweets were a popular Victorian Christmas treat in Germany, England and parts of North America. Dorothy Timberlake Candies of Madison, New Hampshire, made moulded barley candies from 1971 to 2009, and its collection of antique moulds included more than 13,000 shapes.

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