

What is the difference between toffee and caramel?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Toffee and caramel are easy to mix up. They share most of their ingredients, both are brown and buttery, and soft caramels are sometimes even sold as toffee. But they are made differently, and the difference shows in the bite.

Side by side

| | Toffee | Caramel sweets | |---|---|---| | Main ingredients | Sugar or molasses, butter, occasionally flour | Milk or cream, sugar, glucose, butter, vanilla | | Sugar | Brown sugar or molasses | White sugar | | Cooked to | Hard crack, 149 to 154°C | 130°C, then 120°C after the cream is added | | Texture | Hard and brittle, or chewy if cooked less | Soft, dense and chewy |

Two meanings of caramel

The word caramel covers two different things. One is caramelised sugar: sugar heated slowly to around 170°C, until its molecules break down into compounds with a brown colour and a rich flavour. The other is the sweet called caramel, a soft, dense, chewy sweet whose main flavour is caramelised sugar: see [how is caramel made?](#)

How each is cooked

Toffee is made by caramelising sugar or molasses with butter, and occasionally flour, until the mixture reaches the hard crack stage, 149 to 154°C. At that temperature very little water is left, so it sets hard. Toffee is sometimes mixed with nuts or raisins: see [how is toffee made?](#)

Caramels are cooked in two stages. The sugar and glucose are heated to 130°C, then cream and butter are added, which cools the mixture. It is stirred and brought back to 120°C, and the vanilla, other flavourings and salt go in at the end, so that they do not burn off. There is also a gentler method, milk caramel or cream caramel, where everything is cooked together and never heated above 120°C, the firm ball stage. That is not hot enough to caramelize the sugar, so it is the milk that browns.

What they have in common

Both are non crystalline sweets. Food scientists sort sugar sweets into two groups: crystalline ones such as fudge and fondant, which are full of tiny sugar crystals, and non crystalline ones such as hard sweets, caramels, toffees and nougats, which are smooth all the way through: see [what is the difference between fudge and toffee?](#)

Toffee and butterscotch are closer to each other than either is to caramel, because both use brown sugar or molasses. Butterscotch is boiled only to the soft crack stage: see [how is butterscotch made?](#)

English toffee in America

In the United States, English toffee means a very buttery toffee, often made with almonds, like the centre of a Heath bar. It is not much like most of the toffee sold in Britain, where a similar sweet is known as butter crunch.

Where the words come from

Caramel came into English from French, which borrowed it from Spanish caramelo, most likely from a Late Latin word for sugar cane. The origin of toffee is unknown; it was first printed in 1825, as a variation of taffy. Both toffee and caramel usually contain milk products, so check the label: see [milk in sweets](#)

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