

How is salt liquorice made?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Salt liquorice, also called salty liquorice or salmiak liquorice, and salmiakki in Finland, is liquorice flavoured with salmiak salt. It is a common sweet in the Nordic countries, the Benelux countries and northern Germany, and it is almost always black or very dark brown, from soft and chewy to hard and brittle.

How it is made

1. **Make the liquorice.** Salt liquorice starts as ordinary liquorice. Liquorice root is dried, grated and boiled to make an extract, which is cooked with sugars and starch or flour into a thick black paste: see [how is liquorice made?](#)
2. **Add the salmiak.** Salmiak salt, which is ammonium chloride, is mixed into the paste. Anise oil can be added too.
3. **Shape it.** The paste is formed into pieces, from soft sweets to hard pastilles. A traditional shape is a black diamond shaped lozenge.
4. **Coat it, for extra salty.** Extra salty liquorice is coated with salmiak salt or salmiak powder, or sometimes table salt.

What salmiak is

Salmiak, or sal ammoniac, is ammonium chloride. It is not the same as table salt, which is sodium chloride. It gives salty liquorice an astringent, salty taste, a little like the tannins in red wine, which add bitterness to the flavour. Salty liquorice sweets are almost always black or dark brown, although white and grey ones are made too.

When you suck one, the slightly acidic ammonium chloride, at a pH of about 5.5, meets your more alkaline saliva, at a pH of about 7. That reaction releases a little ammonia, which is said to have a disinfecting effect.

How much goes in

The strength depends on how much food grade ammonium chloride is used, and that varies from country to country. In Sweden, the most popular types contain an average of 7 per cent. In 2012 there was a European Union proposal to limit it to 0.3 per cent, which met wide opposition. The European Union now limits ammonium chloride to 0.3 per cent in most foods, but has no specific restriction for liquorice or ice cream.

Germany once had its own rules. Salty liquorice with more than 2 per cent ammonium chloride had to be labelled adult liquorice, not children's liquorice, and between 4.49 and 7.99 per cent it also had to say extra strong. More than 7.99 per cent was not allowed at the time, although that upper limit has since been lifted.

From the chemist's shop

Sal ammoniac has long been used as a cough medicine, because it helps bring up phlegm. One Finnish author suggests salty liquorice began in pharmacies that made their own cough remedies. Nobody knows exactly where the two were first combined, but by the 1930s salty liquorice pastilles were being made in Finland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and the Netherlands, where it is zoute drop, or dubbelzoute drop for double salted.

Salt liquorice in pick and mix

Salty liquorice often turns up in Swedish pick and mix, alongside sour gums and foam sweets: see [what is Swedish pick and mix?](#) Liquorice made with liquorice extract contains glycyrrhizin, so it is best enjoyed in moderation: see [liquorice and blood pressure](#)

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