

How are sweets coloured?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Colour is one of the first things you notice about a sweet, and makers can supply it as a liquid, a powder, a gel or a paste. When it goes in depends on how the sweet is made.

When the colour goes in

- **Boiled sweets and lollipops.** Colour is added after the sugar has been cooked. The machinery maker Loynds describes adding liquid colours and flavours by syringe to the hot batch on a cold, oiled slab and folding them in like dough. At Spangler, which makes Dum Dums, colour and flavour are added in a mixing bowl after cooking: see [how are lollipops made?](#)
- **Striped sweets.** For candy canes, the white candy and the coloured stripes are prepared separately, and the stripes are laid onto the white log on a heating table: see [how are candy canes made?](#)
- **Panned sweets.** For hard panned sweets, one trade guide builds up the colour in the final five or six coats of syrup, so the colour sits in the outer shell: see [what is sugar panning?](#)
- **Jellies and gums.** Colour is mixed into the syrup before it is poured into starch moulds: see [what is starch moulding?](#)
- **Printed sweets.** Love Hearts are pressed from coloured sugar powder, and then the message on the front is picked out in red food colour so it can be read: see [how are message heart sweets made?](#)

What the colours are made of

Colours in sweets are either synthetic or natural. Synthetic dyes are intense, so only tiny amounts are needed, and that often makes them cheaper. In the UK and the EU, the permitted synthetic colours sit in the range E102 to E143: see [what are E numbers in sweets?](#)

Natural colours come in four main families: carotenoids for yellows and oranges, chlorophyll for greens, anthocyanins for reds, purples and blues, and betanin, the red of beetroot. Annatto from seeds and carmine from an insect are also used. Natural blues are rare, and spirulina, an alga, has become one source of blue: see [natural colours in sweets](#) and [what is spirulina doing in my sweets?](#)

The Southampton colours

Six synthetic colours carry a warning in the UK and EU that they may have an adverse effect on activity and attention in children, after a study at the University of Southampton: see [the Southampton six colours](#)

When colours were poison

Colour has not always been safe. In the 19th century red lead and vermilion, a compound of mercury, were routinely used to colour cheese and confectionery, and sellers offered more than 80 artificial colouring agents, some invented for dyeing cloth. Many had never been tested for safety, and injuries and even deaths followed. In 1856 William Henry Perkin made mauveine, the first synthetic colour, and in 1882 German food rules banned minerals such as arsenic, copper, chromium, lead, mercury and zinc from colourings.

Why your tongue turns blue

Strong colours can stain your tongue for a while after you eat a sweet: see [why do sweets change the colour of your tongue?](#)

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