

How are sour sweets made?

From the sweeties.net wiki

Sour sweets are sweets with a sharp, acid taste, from sour cherries and apple rings to fizzy belts. The sourness comes from food acids, and makers can put them in two places: inside the sweet, and on the outside.

Acid inside

Acids can be mixed into the sweet itself. For boiled sweets, the machinery maker Loynds describes sprinkling powdered citric acid over the hot batch on the slab once the colours and flavours are in, and working it through. See [how are pear drops made?](#)

Acid outside: sour sanding

For a sharper first hit, the finished sweets are coated in sour sanding, also called sour sugar: sugar mixed with citric, tartaric and malic acids. It is used on sour gums and lemon drops, and to make hard sweets taste tart. A patent from the ingredients maker Purac describes the usual way it is applied:

1. **Moisten.** The sweets are moistened with steam or a sticky solution, so the crystals will cling.
2. **Tumble.** They are tumbled in the mixture of sugar and acid crystals.
3. **Dry.** The coated sweets are dried.

The aim is a sour taste the instant the sweet touches your tongue, which stays strong while it is eaten.

The sticky problem

The trouble is that citric, malic and lactic acids are hygroscopic: they pull in moisture from the air and from the sweet. A plain acid coating can leave sweets sticky and wet looking, and less sour than intended. In soft sweets that are about 10 per cent water, some of the acid also moves into the sweet, leaving less at the surface.

Makers have two main answers:

- **Coated acids.** The acid crystals are given a protective coating to keep moisture out. The same patent notes that these are costly.
- **Partly neutralised acids.** Part acid and part salt, such as sodium hydrogen malate. The acid part still tastes sour, while the salt part stops the crystals soaking up water, so the coating stays dry and the sourness stays at the surface.

Which acid?

Malic acid, the acid of apples, tastes sourer than citric acid, so it goes into very sour sweets. Some of those carry a warning that eating too many can irritate the mouth: see [what is malic acid in sweets?](#) Why your face screws up is another story: see [why do sour sweets make your mouth pucker?](#)

Sour and your teeth

Acid on the teeth is worth keeping in mind with very sour sweets: see [sweets and teeth](#). Our sour sweets, including [SW017](#) and [SW021](#), each have a card that opens up to show the full ingredients and allergens.

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