

## Sweet Candy-making Tips

Candies come in many different colors, shapes, sizes, and flavors. Throughout history, candies have evolved along with availability of ingredients and automation of candy making. Candies are a treat in the United States, and worldwide.

Before sugar was easily found, honey was used to make the first candies. Fruits, nuts, and flowers were coated with honey for preservation and sweetness which created a type of candy. The first type of candy made from actual sugar was rock candy that was simply made from crystallized sugar. It was considered a luxury and only wealthy people could afford it in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Today, we have access to any ingredient we could ever want at the click of a mouse with online shopping, and many ingredients that were once considered rare are now even found in our local markets. So, there is no excuse to not try making your own homemade candy.

Fundamentally, to make candy, sugar is boiled in water or milk until it begins to caramelize. The specific steps you will need to follow for making candy depend on the type of confectionery you're creating and the recipe you follow. Successful candy-making is relatively easy if you know the tricks of the trade.

First and foremost, you must have a good, accurate candy thermometer. The thermometer is used frequently during candy-making to monitor the temperature while it cooks. There are candy thermometers that attach to the side of a saucepan and thermometers with a probe that you insert into the candy mixture. Do not rest the bulb on the bottom or side of the pan, or it will give an inaccurate reading. Read the thermometer at eye level. To avoid breaking it, let the thermometer cool before washing it.

Choose a dry day for making candy. Candy will take on moisture from the air, so it might refuse to set. If you choose to make candy on a humid, rainy, or snowy day, you may need to make modifications to the recipe, such as increasing the cooking temperature the candy.

When making candy, be sure to use a heavy saucepan to prevent scorching or burning. In addition, make sure it is large enough to prevent boiling over. Avoid using thin aluminum pans when making candy.

It is important to use fresh ingredients available when making candy. Additionally, you must use the exact ingredients as specified in the recipe; do **not** substitute ingredients. For example, if the recipe calls for butter, don't substitute margarine. Measure out all of the ingredients before you start cooking.

Candy making often relies on melted sugar, which can be dangerous. Take care not to walk away from the mixture when it's on the stove, and avoid burns by leaning back and carefully adding ingredients to a hot mixture.

Candy making is both an exact science and an art. Follow the recipe EXACTLY. One of the most critical aspects of candy-making is controlling the crystallization of the sugar. To do this,

the sugar should be dissolved into liquid ingredients over low heat and brought to a boil. The mixture should not be stirred after the sugar has dissolved unless the recipe calls for it.

Cook the candy until the desired temperature is reached. It is important to know your altitude and whether or not you will need to make modifications for your candy recipes. A general rule for high altitude adjustments when candy-making is for every 500 feet above sea level, decrease the temperature by one degree. When done cooking, be sure to remove the pan from the heat immediately, and cool the bottom of the pan in a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking, unless the recipe says otherwise.

The candy needs to be appropriately stored. Store wrapped candy in boxes, tins, or cartons with tight-fitting lids. If the candy is not wrapped in plastic, place parchment or waxed paper between layers of candy to prevent sticking. Store hard and soft candies in separate containers to avoid changes in texture.

To make candy at home, you basically use everyday kitchen items, but be sure you have your candy thermometer. Add a great recipe, simple ingredients, and some basic candy-making knowledge and you are ready to add candy to your homemade holiday goodies this year.

(Sources: [www.craftybaking.com](http://www.craftybaking.com); [www.escoffieronline.com](http://www.escoffieronline.com); [tasteofhome.com](http://tasteofhome.com); [www.thespruceeats.com](http://www.thespruceeats.com); [wyoextension.org](http://wyoextension.org))