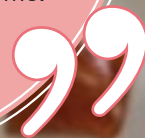


“ I would stand transfixed before the windows of the confectioners' shops, fascinated by the luminous sparkle of candied fruits, the cloudy lustre of jellies, the kaleidoscope inflorescence of acidulated fruitdrops—red, green, orange, violet: I coveted the colours themselves as much as the pleasure they promised me.

— Simone de Beauvoir



AN ORGANIC “TWIST” ON CANDY CANES

You might wonder why I would make my own hard candy, given it's so abundant and cheap this time of year, but I wanted my grandkids to taste the real deal—candy minus all the weird ingredients—just like my grandmother made. And you can shape them any way you choose—make stick candy, shape into candy canes, or cut into bite-size nibbles. When working with the hot candy syrup, use extreme caution—it's VERY hot and can splash and burn. Shoo the kids out of the kitchen for this stage—once your syrup has cooled to the stage where you can work it into shapes, you can let them help.

PREP TIME: 1 HOUR

COOK TIME: 35 MINUTES

MAKES: 18 STICKS

2½ cups organic granulated sugar

1½ T organic distilled white vinegar

½ cup plus 1 T beet juice (see below), or undiluted pure pomegranate or cranberry juice

1 t organic peppermint extract

1. Preheat oven to 200°F.
2. Place a “Silpat” (silicone non-stick baking mat) onto a rimmed metal baking sheet and put in oven on top rack to warm it. Remove the baking sheet from the oven a few minutes before the syrup is done cooking and turn the oven off.
3. Combine sugar, vinegar, and beet juice in a 2-quart saucepan. Wearing heat-resistant neoprene or silicone gloves, bring syrup to a boil, then reduce heat to medium-low and cook for about 30 minutes, until syrup reaches 285°F on a candy thermometer, or until very minimal browning is noticed on top of bubbles. (Again, use extreme caution when handling the syrup—it's like molten lava until it cools.) Remove from heat and quickly stir in peppermint extract.
4. Immediately, pour syrup slowly and cautiously into the center of the Silpat. Wearing your gloves and working very carefully, quickly lift and hold the edges of the Silpat to keep syrup in the center of the pad while it cools.
5. When syrup has cooled enough not to run off the Silpat, begin pressing and folding the syrup into itself, using the edges of the Silpat. The syrup is very sticky, so don't touch your gloves to it. Continue this kneading process for about 25 minutes. The syrup will become a glossy mound of candy.
6. After 25 minutes, the candy should be cooled enough to shape, but if it is still too hot or sticky to mold, it is not ready. Test with a small piece. You can now remove the gloves and let the kids back into the kitchen. Grease your hands to prevent sticking. Divide candy in half and place one half on another baking sheet with a Silpat in the oven (it's now off, but still warm) to keep it pliable while you work with the first part of the mixture. (This is best done with a gal pal so that all the candy mixture can be worked at once. As my husband watched me make this, he said, “This must be why they call it hard candy!” Making candy isn't for the faint-hearted.) Pull off a smaller-than-golf-ball-piece of candy and pulling hands in opposite directions, stretch the candy into a rope. Bring the ends of the strands together, and then twist the strands together. Place your twisted rope on the Silpat and bend top into candy cane shape. Use kitchen scissors to trim or to cut into bite-size pieces.
7. Occasionally turn your finished candy canes on the Silpat until the candy has completely hardened to keep them from flattening. Store them out of the sunlight to keep them from melting or losing color and luster.

Beet Juice: Color your candy canes organically with beet juice. Wash beets, leaving tails and crowns intact and beets whole. Place in large pan and cover with water. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce to a simmer and partially cover with lid. Whole beets will take 1½–2 hours to cook; until they feel tender when pierced with a fork. You'll be left with a pan of bright red beet juice and beets whose skins slip off easily when partially cool, perfect for slices to use in salads. Tip: Freeze the remaining beet juice for coloring Easter eggs.

