

Horehound

History:

Horehound is one of the best worst things in existence. Many hard candies began as herbal medicines, and horehound is no exception. While traveling through Wall Drug on a road trip with a friend, I found a bag of horehound and was in heaven; when I gave my friend a piece, I've never seen anyone spit anything out so fast in my life. That's the beauty of horehound; it's an attention-grabber on a table, because it's such an acquired taste. You'll have to have a small bundle of napkins and a wastebasket next to your candy bowl. But I was raised on the herb by a grandfather who loved it (and anise!) and throughout history, it wasn't always such an acquired taste. For most of the 16th and 17th centuries, it was a familiar medicinal lozenge, a precursor to modern cough drops, and its herbal medicinal qualities have been used since Ancient times (Joseph Dommers Vehling's translation of Apicius, from 1-3rd century C.E., contains a glossary item for horehound). The earliest recipes available for it were medicines, generally sweetened syrups, and it is believed the hard candy version evolved from the syrup in the 17th century for the sake of convenience. This recipe uses only simple, old-fashioned ingredients, and makes about 12 dozen hard candies.

Ingredients:

1 ½ qt water
1 qt loosely packed horehound leaves and stems
3 c sugar (We prefer brown for added sweetness, but white will work.)
1 tsp cream of tartar
1 tsp lemon juice
1 tsp butter
Superfine sugar, to taste

Original 1615 Directions:

For the phthisic. Take horehound, violet leaves, and hyssop of ech [sic] a good handful, seethe them in water, and put thereto a little saffron, liquorice [sic], and sugar candy; after they have boiled a good while, then strain it into an earthen vessel, and let the sick drink thereov [sic] six spoonful at a time morning and evening.

Leah's Modifications:

What do you mean, you don't have violet leaves sitting around? Or hyssop? Let's make this easier, shall we? First, if you can't find horehound leaves, you can substitute horehound tea, but you might have to taste-test the strength of the tea proportions for measurement accuracy. Combine the water and the horehound in a large saucepan, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, and simmer 30 minutes. Remove from the heat, cover, and let steep for 30 minutes. Strain it. Discard horehound, keeping the liquid. Combine liquid, cream of tartar, and sugar in a medium saucepan. Slowly bring to a boil, stirring until sugar dissolves. Cover and cook over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes to get all the sugar crystals melted from the sides. Uncover and cook, without stirring, until mixture reaches 220° F. Add butter, but do not stir. Continue cooking, without stirring, until mixture reaches hard crack stage (300° F). Add lemon juice, but do not stir. Gently shake pan. Quickly pour syrup onto a roughly 15" x 10" x 1" jellyroll pan. Let cool slightly. Mark the top of the warm candy into 1" squares or rectangles, using a sharp knife. Cool completely, and break into squares. It's okay if they have uneven edges, as early candy didn't have perfect molds, but if you want them to have a different shape, then remove them just before they are completely cool, and mold the edges. Roll the candies in superfine sugar or powdered sugar to get a nice powdered look. Wrap in wax paper to keep fresh.



Adapted from *The English Housewife* by Gervase Markham, published in 1615, with further adaptations from Oxmoor House, and modified by Leah Angstman.