Twiglets: the knobbly yeast extract snack invented by accident at Peek Freans

From the crackers.biz wiki

Twiglets are knobbly, twig shaped wholewheat snacks coated in a yeast extract seasoning. Wikipedia says the French biscuit maker J. Rondalin invented them in 1929 at Peek Freans' Bermondsey factory by adding brewer's yeast to a leftover batch of Vitawheat dough, and that Peek Freans launched them in 1932. Jacob's makes them today, in Aintree near Liverpool.

A snack that looks like a twig

Twiglets are one of Britain's most distinctive snacks: brown, knobbly, crunchy little sticks that really do look like twigs, with a deep, salty, savoury flavour that people either love or cannot stand. Wikipedia describes them as a wheat based snack with a distinctive knobbly shape, and notes that their flavour has been compared to Marmite, because of the yeast extract coating. They live in a grey area between biscuit, cracker and crisp, and they have been doing so for almost a century. For biscuits and oatcakes made with Marmite itself, see Marmite biscuits.

Invented by accident

Like many great foods, Twiglets began as an accident. Wikipedia records that in 1929 a French biscuit maker, J. Rondalin, working at the Peek Freans factory in Bermondsey, in south London, added brewer's yeast to a leftover batch of Vitawheat dough. The result was the Twiglet. Peek Freans launched them on the market in 1932. The same factory, which gave Bermondsey the nickname Biscuit Town, also gave the world the Garibaldi, the Marie and the Bourbon; see Peek Freans.

A Christmas treat in a tin

For decades Twiglets were a festive luxury. Wikipedia records that from the 1930s until the 1970s they were traditionally sold at Christmas in drum shaped tins, as a high class accompaniment to cocktails. That is why, for many British families, a bowl of Twiglets still means Christmas, alongside the cheese biscuits and the selection box; see Christmas biscuits and biscuit tins.

Why are they called Twiglets?

The name says it all. Wikipedia describes the snack's distinctive knobbly shape as similar to twigs, and a bowl of Twiglets does look like a handful of kindling. The retailer listing describes them simply as baked

wheat snack sticks coated in a yeast extract seasoning. Peek Freans had a knack for names: in the same decade it also introduced Cheeselets, little cheese biscuits for the cocktail hour.

Who makes Twiglets now?

Peek Freans' British business passed through several owners, and Twiglets ended up with Jacob's. Wikipedia says Jacob's, a subsidiary of United Biscuits, makes them in Aintree, near Liverpool, where Jacob's opened its first English factory in 1914. United Biscuits has been part of pladis since 2016, alongside McVitie's; see Jacob's crackers.

From the mill

Wikipedia adds a lovely detail about the flour. For many years the grain for Twiglets was prepared with hammer milling machinery at the Parker Brothers Lark Roller Mills in Mildenhall, in Suffolk, powered by water turbines until the late twentieth century.

Flavours old and new

Twiglets have had a few spin offs over the years. Wikipedia records a Worcestershire sauce version in the early 1990s; a curry flavour from 1999 to 2001, developed with Indian restaurants in the north of England; and Tangy Twiglets, brought back as a limited edition from 2010 to 2012 to mark the brand's 80th anniversary. The original, though, is the one that has lasted.

What is in a Twiglet?

A retailer listing of the ingredients of Jacob's Twiglets Original reads: wholewheat flour at 80 per cent, vegetable oils from sunflower and palm, a flavouring made of yeast extract from barley, salt and carrot extract, then salt, potassium chloride, magnesium chloride and white pepper. So a Twiglet is mostly wholewheat, which gives it its nutty crunch, and the flavour comes from the yeast extract seasoning.

Twiglets and Marmite

Twiglets are often called the snack for Marmite lovers, and the comparison is fair: both get their savoury, salty depth from yeast extract. But the listing names yeast extract, not Marmite, so the two are relatives rather than the same thing.

Twiglets or pretzels?

Both are brown, crunchy and salty, but they are made differently. Twiglets are wholewheat sticks coated in a yeast extract seasoning, while pretzels are usually a white wheat dough, twisted into a knot or stick and sprinkled with coarse salt. Twiglets taste far more savoury.

How to serve Twiglets

Twiglets are made for a bowl at a party, a drink before dinner or a Christmas buffet. They go well with a cold beer, a glass of sherry or a gin and tonic, and they sit happily alongside other savoury snacks such as Jacob's Mini Cheddars, Jacob's Cheddars, TUC crackers and Ritz. For more savoury biscuits, see cheese

biscuits and crackers.

How long do Twiglets last?

Because they are baked dry, Twiglets keep well in an unopened bag. Once opened, keep them in a sealed container, because like any dry snack they will slowly absorb moisture from the air and lose their crunch; see why biscuits go soft. The date on the pack is a best before date, which GOV.UK explains is about quality, not safety; see biscuits and best before dates.

Diet notes

Twiglets are made from wholewheat flour, and the yeast extract comes from barley, so they contain gluten and are not suitable for coeliacs. The ingredient list names no animal products, but always read the pack for allergy advice.

Quick facts

Invented	1929, by J. Rondalin at Peek Freans, Bermondsey
The accident	Brewer's yeast added to leftover Vitawheat dough
Launched	1932, by Peek Freans
Made today	By Jacob's, in Aintree
Christmas tins	Drum shaped tins, from the 1930s to the 1970s
Main ingredient	Wholewheat flour, 80 per cent in a retailer listing

Questions people ask

Who invented Twiglets?

Wikipedia credits J. Rondalin, a French biscuit maker at Peek Freans' factory in Bermondsey, who in 1929 added brewer's yeast to a leftover batch of Vitawheat dough. Peek Freans launched Twiglets in 1932.

Who makes Twiglets now?

Jacob's, part of United Biscuits, which Wikipedia says makes them in Aintree. United Biscuits has been part of pladis since 2016.

What are Twiglets made of?

A retailer listing of the ingredients reads: wholewheat flour at 80 per cent, sunflower and palm oils, a flavouring of yeast extract from barley, salt and carrot extract, salt, potassium chloride, magnesium chloride and white pepper.

Are Twiglets vegan?

The ingredient list names no animal products, but check the pack for may contain warnings if you avoid milk or egg for allergy reasons.

Are Twiglets gluten free?

No. They are made mainly from wholewheat flour, and the yeast extract comes from barley.

Do Twiglets contain Marmite?

Not by name. Their flavour is often compared to Marmite because both are based on yeast extract, but the listing names yeast extract rather than Marmite itself.

Sources

1. Twiglets, Wikipedia
2. Jacob's Twiglets Original 150g, British Food Supplies
3. Peek Freans, Wikipedia

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