

# Stick to the normal candy and nobody gets hurt

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Hallowe'en is a family affair at Microsoft. It typically starts at around 3 or 4 o'clock, with costumed kids roaming the hallways collecting treats from offices. One year, one of my colleagues decided that the kids deserved more than the usual candy bars and chocolates. Even though he is Caucasian, he went to the local Asian foods market and stocked up on all sorts of Asian candies. Lychee-flavored gelatin, rice crackers, spiced watermelon seeds, you name it. It's a holiday *and* a cultural learning experience. He dumped all the candies into a big bowl and set them out for the kids.

The kids didn't quite know what to make of it. They'd knock on the door, say *Trick or Treat*, reach for the bowl and... freeze, or possibly even recoil.

"It's okay, Johnny. Just take one," Johnny's parents cajoled.

Little Johnny remained unconvinced.

Many kids would hesitantly pick out a candy. Some would back away slowly and move to the next office.

One reaction came from some teenage girls who said (probably in reaction to the rice crackers), "You cheapskate! You just went to the cafeteria and took some crackers!" He was unable to convince them that, no, these aren't soup crackers; they're Asian candy.

The day wound down, and my friend still had a lot of candy left over. I wandered over to check on him and brought another Caucasian colleague (let's call him Bob) so we could marvel at what those wacky Asians consider candy. We sifted through the bowl, and Bob shouted out, "Hey, I remember these!"

My friend and I were kind of surprised that Bob recognized an obscure Asian candy. Bob explained, "Yeah, I had a Chinese roommate in college, and he would sometimes eat these." Bob cracked open the package and popped one into his mouth. "Yup, it's the same stuff. I wonder what it is."

We looked at the package. It identified itself as haw flakes. What are haw flakes? We didn't know. Maybe the ingredients panel will give us a clue.

“Ingredients: Haw, sugar.”

Okay, that didn't help much.

From then on, my friend bought the normal candy to give out on Hallowe'en.

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