Rock Candy

During the Civil War Era, rock candy was enjoyed by kids. They flavored it with natural dyes, including beet juice and boiling spearmint. You can make rock candy by first rolling the string in sugar which starts “seed crystals” that help anchor other crystals. The sugar water mixture is a supersaturated mixture, where sugar is very dense in the water. When you place the jar into the sun, the sun works to evaporate the water from the mixture, leaving just the sugar crystals. The sugar crystals will stick to the seed crystals, causing the rock candy to form. These candy sticks will grow molecule, by molecule!

Materials

- String
- Pencil
- Clear jar like a mason jar
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup water
- Pot
- Stove
- Food coloring
  - Optional: Candy flavoring (like peppermint, cherry or lemon)
- Note: you will need an adult to help with this activity

Instructions

1. Tie one end of the string to the pencil. Cut the string so it won’t touch the bottom of the jar when the pencil is laid across the opening.

2. Wet the string. Roll the string through sugar, so the string is slightly covered in sugar. Place the pencil across the opening of the jar so that the string hangs inside without touching the sides.

3. Adults should help with the next three steps! Pour the sugar and water in a pot. Place on the stove, and wait for it to boil. Make sure to stir so sugar dissolves.
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4. Remove from heat as soon as it boils, and stir in the food coloring and extract, if using.

5. Pour mixture into the jar.

6. Set the jar somewhere it won’t spill and can sit for a few days. Sunny spots are better because the sun will help the water evaporate faster.

7. Let this jar sit for at least three days. You will start seeing crystals form after a few hours, but they will continue to grow the longer it sits.

8. Enjoy!