

SPICE IS NICE

Changing consumer preferences and global influences are bringing bolder flavors to the table

By Jody Shee

A few seismic shifts in consumer preferences will push spices further to the forefront in 2020: healthier lifestyles, the rise of global food trends and plant-forward dishes.

No doubt, consumers have developed a taste for bolder flavors and more heavily spiced foods. According to Mintel's *International Food Trends* report from January, 44.1 percent of surveyed consumers said they prefer foods cooked with lots of spices in 2018 compared to 38.5 percent in 2010. These flavors have come more into focus because in recent years thanks to changing consumer preferences.

The wellness factor

Spices fit squarely in the center of the growing trend toward functional foods. College students and Gen Zers are looking for foods to meet their personal nutrition interests, and that also have bold, authentic flavors, says Joe Labombarda (pictured opposite top), corporate executive chef for Chartwells Higher Education Dining Services, a division of Compass Group North America, in Rye Brook, N.Y.

To meet the growing demand for flavorful, functional foods, earlier this

year Chartwells introduced a Fueling Your Unique Lifestyle menu with dishes targeting specific health benefits like immunity, heart-health, healthy skin, sustained energy and recovery, and spices play a key role. The *Clean Eats* Chicken Shrimp & Quinoa Jambalaya contains cayenne and cumin; the *Healthy Skin* poached salmon with curried quinoa and mango salad contains turmeric, and the *Recovery* fried turnip and kimchi contains ginger and *gochugaru*, a chili pepper powder. Pickles, rich with cloves, bay leaf, mustard seed, peppercorn and ginger, also fit squarely in the recovery platform, touted for their muscle cramp-reducing properties. "For 2020, we will continue to celebrate turmeric and za'atar, and will start recipe development with spirulina, activated charcoal and sumac," Labombarda says.

Going global

The growing popularity of global cuisines is also shaping current and

Opposite top left: Harissa Glazed Spanish Octopus; courtesy of McCormick & Co. Inc.
Opposite: Promoting healthy skin, Chartwells-managed colleges and universities have the option to serve Turmeric Poached Salmon with Curried Quinoa & Mango Salad; courtesy of Chartwells Higher Education Dining Services



future spice trends. Gary Patterson (pictured center), director of culinary for spice company McCormick & Co. Inc., in Hunt Valley, Md., highlights four global cuisines as the biggest drivers of trending spices and seasonings: African, Japanese, Middle Eastern and Indian.

From Africa, Ethiopia's popular *berbere* seasoning combines an assortment of spices, from paprika to allspice, coriander, cardamom, ginger and red pepper, Patterson says. He also points out South Africa's emerging *peri-peri* seasoning, based on the fiery heat of the peri-peri pepper. North Africa's still-emerging harissa has untapped potential. He suggests mixing it with yogurt for a dip or combining it with roasted bell peppers and oil to make a sauce.

To make the most of emerging Japanese flavors, Patterson suggests experimenting with Japanese seven spice (red pepper, nori flakes, ginger, orange peel, Sichuan pepper and white and black sesame seeds) — a blend commonly found in ramen. Japanese noodle bowls also frequently incorporate *gomasio*, a dry condiment of *unhulled* sesame seeds and salt. Dried *furikake* seasoning gives dishes a boost of umami, thanks to its blend of seaweed, sesame, dried fish, sugar and salt.

From the Middle East comes shawarma, a street food favorite that incorporates such spices as cumin, coriander and cinnamon. *Schug* is an authentic, mildly spicy sauce or condiment containing cumin, cardamom, coriander, Thai bird chilies and garlic. *Baharat* is another traditional



Eastern Mediterranean seasoning that features black pepper, cumin, cardamom, cloves, coriander, nutmeg and paprika, according to Patterson.

Indian cuisine has steadily risen in popularity in the U.S. *Chaat masala* is one versatile spice mix gaining in popularity, he says, adding that its most notable ingredient is dried green mango powder, or *amchoor*. It also includes black salt, cumin, coriander, ginger and garlic.

And, "given the elevation of authentic Indian cuisine, I expect to see less generic yellow curry powder and more housemade curry with traditional spices, such as cinnamon, cumin and coriander," says David Kamen (pictured bottom), assistant director of consulting for The Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, N.Y.

Plants forward

Besides the unique spice-filled flavors global cuisines offer, these popular regions also stand out for their plant-based dishes, which also showcase unique flavors and spices.

"It doesn't matter what animal is used for the dish," Kamen says, "it's about the flavor that the spice blends create." Case-in-point: many Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Latin American meat and non-meat dishes use sofrito, a blend of cooked peppers, tomatoes, onions and garlic, as the base for building flavors.

Spices are well-positioned for future menu development as consumers and culinary pros alike favor these plant-based options as well as better-for-you fare and global flavors.

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