

Nuts Deliver Nutrition, Functionality, and Taste

Nuts hit all the hot buttons in the food world today, supplying a bevy of nutrients, natural functionality, foodie/gourmet value, and unique crunch and texture. Snacks and breakfast are projected to be among the fastest-growing food categories through 2018, according to the NPD Group's 2011 report, *A Look into the Future of Eating*, and nuts can play an important role in both categories. Nuts, consumed in 85% of households, come in at No. 4, right after fruit, vegetables, and chips, on the list of America's most popular snacks. In addition, 43% of households consume trail mix, according to Mintel's *Nuts and Dried Fruit—U.S.*, a 2012 report.

Peanuts are the most popular nut, consumed in 73% of households, followed by almonds 61%, cashews 54%, pecans 44%, walnuts 42%, and pistachios 40%, reports Mintel. Use of many of the less frequently consumed nuts, a list that includes macadamia, hazelnuts, Brazil, pine, chestnuts, and hickory, is highest in households headed by those under age 35, explains Mintel. This reflects the foodie focus of younger adults and suggests a big opportunity for growing sales of nuts and nut-based snacks. Nearly 60% of younger households would like to see more savory flavored nuts, and nearly 50% would like to see more sweet nuts.

With one-quarter of adults bringing breakfast from home to eat at work, 30% eating en route, and 10% of kids brown-bagging

breakfast to school, according to Technomic's 2012 *Breakfast Consumer Trend Report*, there is a clear opportunity for these high-protein, portable snacks to become early morning superstars.

The protein and fiber content of nuts position them to address three of the things consumers polled by the International Food Information Council for its 2009 *Breakfast Survey* said would prompt them to consume breakfast more frequently. These include "helps me to feel full," "provides energy," and "helps manage weight."

More than half (55%) of households are adding nuts to salads, 45% use them as an ingredient in entrees, 38% add nuts to cereal, and 31% add them to yogurt. In households with children, making customized trail mixes is another hot trend, per

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Mintel. Nuts are also penetrating new categories. Blue Diamond's *Nut Chips* are a new form of crisps; Mueller's yogurt in Europe offers slivered almonds to mix in under the lid; and freeze-dried instant coffee is made with whole almond kernels in Russia.

The "crunchiness factor" is another plus for nuts. One-quarter (27%) of diners are more likely to order a menu item described as crisp/crunchy in restaurants, according to Technomic's 2011 *Consumer Flavor Trends Report*.

With American regional cuisine and "grown in the U.S." such strong foodservice trends, nuts (e.g., pecans) that are native to the U.S. may quickly grab chefs' attention. Nuts can add texture and crunch to side dishes such as non-wheat noodles, black/red rice, and quinoa, all of which American Culinary Federation chefs characterized as trendy for 2012.

Substituting other varieties of nuts in traditional ethnic foods (e.g., stir-fry is served in 12% of all U.S. households every week, according to the 2011 Gallup Survey of Dinner) can create simple and sustainable culinary excitement. Nuts can provide a crispy culinary coating for center-of-the-plate items.

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consider them a good source of energy. While sodium and fat have sometimes been issues of concern for consumers when it comes to nuts, only 30% and 33% of consumers, respectively, limit the amount of nuts they eat for these reasons. With most nuts a powerhouse of nearly 20 vitamins/minerals as well as an excellent source of protein and a good source of fiber, they are a unique ingredient for naturally fortifying other foods. Nuts are also gluten-free.

Just about half (47%) of food shoppers bought almonds for their superfood properties last year and 35% bought walnuts, according to the Food Marketing Institute's 2011 *Shopping for Health Report*. Nuts are among the best sources of the "good fats," i.e., polyunsaturated and monounsaturated, and naturally contain plant sterols and omega-3s. Because of their ability to lower LDL cholesterol, most nuts now carry the American Heart Assn.'s *Heart Check* symbol. Nuts can also be beneficial for consumers who are dealing with—or seeking to prevent—the next wave of heart health concerns—blood plaque and atherosclerosis. And with 20% of teens having abnormal blood lipid levels in 2012, nuts can also play a role in helping to control risk factors in children.



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