

Q&A Almonds

with
CHEF ROB CORLISS

Fillings, Spreads and Dips: Formulating with Almond Butter Continues to Grow in Popularity – Part 1

According to the 2018 US Nielsen Retail Report, **almond butter has seen a 17 percent volume growth** in retail sales since 2015.¹ You can hardly clear a supermarket aisle without encountering several snacks, sweets, baked goods and even beverages that leverage almond butter's strengths.

Consumers are craving this versatile ingredient with **nearly three-fourths (70 percent) of almond butter users say they've been using it for at least a year**, and 93 percent are consuming as much if not more than they were a year ago.²

We spoke with **Chef Rob Corliss**, owner of culinary consultancy ATE - All Things Epicurean (Nixa, MO), about all things almond butter and the different applications he's created with it. "To me, almond butter is one of the most exciting almond forms to work with," said Chef Rob. "And working with the Almond Board of California's given me a keener look at its recipe-development attributes, immersing me in its applications."

Q Tell us why almond butter is resonating so well with consumers.

CORLISS | Almonds are perpetually on trend and relevant. They're naturally gluten-free foods, craveable, functional, inspirational—and consumer demand for better-for-you craveability is driving growth in almonds. Finding new ways to consume almonds in different forms, like almond butter, was a natural path to adoption.

Also, 2019 has seen consumer appreciation for **healthful fats** evolve, spurred by the keto diet, flexitarian lifestyles and the explosion of plant-based foods. Clean label has also been a huge factor to the growing popularity of almond butter. When a product label lists ingredients like almond butter, dried fruit, nuts, cacao nibs, those are easily recognizable ingredients and exactly what consumers are looking for.

Q Can you share why you and other chefs and product manufacturers are using almond butter more?

CORLISS | First, there's versatility. Almond butter works beautifully as a standalone spread or dip, and as an ingredient in bars, cookies, confections and beverages. It works equally well in sweet and savory applications which opens the door for culinary creativity.

Also, almond butter is a blank canvas: It has a neutral, elegantly nutty flavor and color. Its almond flavor is neither too strong nor too weak, and this amplifies the flavor of whatever other ingredients you use with it, opening up more potential applications. All of this makes almond butter a very useful tool to have in your kit.

Q Almond butter's texture is a big factor, too, right?

CORLISS | Absolutely. Chefs understand how critical texture is to building flavor development. Mouthfeel plays a big role in the overall experience of how we perceive taste. That's where almond butter pays off. It has a silky-smooth texture that coats the mouth and delivers a memorable mouthfeel that will resonate with consumers.

Q How does that texture vary among different types of almond butters?

CORLISS | The texture will vary with each manufacturer's method for pressing, rolling, grinding or crushing the nuts.

For creamy varieties, **roasted blanched almonds will yield a smoother almond butter than roasted natural almonds**, which contribute some texture from the skins. Chunky almond butter isn't as chunky as some other nut butters because the almond particulates are usually chopped smaller.

Though most almond butters include only almonds, some manufacturers add a touch of salt or sugar, and some will add palm or vegetable oil to make the almond butter ultra-smooth. A way to go in another textural direction is to add textured inclusions to the almond butter itself. So it varies.

Q When you tour the grocery store, where do you see almond butter being used in creative ways?

CORLISS | Oh, in so many places. I see it in bars, cookies, wafers, muffins. The fact that you see almond butter showcased as a spread between layers of a bar, or as a central filling or topper on products, speaks to its value as an ingredient. In soft bars, for example, a thin layer of almond butter in the center adds a really creamy texture—you don't need a lot.

We're seeing this across all dayparts, but especially at breakfast, where almond butter is a go-to topper or stir-in for oatmeal, muesli and chia puddings, pancakes and waffles and all sorts of toast creations.

Showcasing almond butter in a dark- or white-chocolate candy—think almond-butter cups—is a match made in snacking heaven. It demonstrates how innovation doesn't have to be about generating something totally new, but can be about making a simple, impactful switch to a beloved classic.

An interesting application I haven't seen yet would be to create an almond butter coating for whole flavored almonds—essentially flavoring an almond with an almond and introducing an initial softer outer layer before getting to the signature inner almond crunch that consumers love. I'm still on the lookout for that.

In prepared foods, almond butter can be used as a finishing element in savory features, adding texture, creaminess and subtle flavor; I recommend adding it at the final moments to maintain its integrity better. And in vinaigrettes and creamy salad dressings, almond butter can act as an **emulsifier**, or as a **textural element in slaw marinades and dressings**.

Finally, in creamy beverages and smoothies, almond butter adds wellness and thickening cues. It's now being called out as a marketable ingredient in these applications, and that wasn't always the case. But it reflects the shift we're seeing with consumers demanding clean labels and more natural ingredients, even in drinks.

[For more almond butter inspiration – including ABC's IFT19 samples – check out Part 2!](#)

References

¹US Retail Product Movement Study. Nielsen. 2018.

²Almond Butter Attitudes & Usage. Sterling Rice Group. April 2018.