

2018 FOOD TRENDS

By Claudia Alarcon

Every year, Whole Foods Market and National Restaurant News release their predictions of the hot food trends for the coming year.

For 2018, they are predicting things like super powders (think matcha and spirulina) and plant-based foods beyond veggie burgers. While some of these trends may not sound appealing to everyone, others are piquing our interests.



FLORAL FLAVORS

Whole Foods predicts more flower-infused dishes and edible flowers used as more than pretty garnishes. Botanical flavors will find their way into drinks and snacks for a subtly sweet taste and fresh aromas. Look for flowers used like herbs in things such as lavender lattés, rose-flavored everything, hot and iced hibiscus teas and elderflower in cocktails. In Austin, El Chipirón tapas bar is already ahead of the trend with their amazing gin and tonics featuring rose petals and edible flowers.

MIDDLE EASTERN CUISINE

Things like hummus, tabouli and falafel hit the mainstream a long time ago. But Whole Foods experts believe that consumers are ready to explore deeper traditions and regional nuances of Middle Eastern cultures. Persian, Israeli, Moroccan, Syrian and Lebanese influences will make more appearances in menus with items like shakshuka, grilled halloumi and lamb dishes spiced with harissa, cardamom and za'atar. Fast-casual concept MezzeMe in Austin is serving these items in build-your-own plate and bowl formats.

VEGETABLE ENTRÉES

Plant-based diets and dishes continue to grow in popularity. Although they are nothing new, vegetable main dishes will become more prevalent in restaurants, according to National Res-

taurant News. Expect more main courses such as rotisserie cauliflower, jackfruit tacos and hominy ceviche, as well as a continued rise in flexitarianism, meaning a mostly plant-based diet with minimal consumption of meat and dairy products. In San Antonio, Southtown favorites Bliss and Feast have several vegetarian options on their menus.

PLANT-BASED PRODUCTS

Through science and technology, food manufacturers are manipulating plant-based ingredients and proteins to create alternatives like the “bleeding” vegan burger, sushi-grade “not-tuna” made from tomatoes, and new varieties of nut milks and yogurts made from pili nuts, peas, bananas, macadamia nuts and pecans. These items are also appealing to meat and dairy eaters. Dairy-free indulgences like vegan frosting, brownies, ice cream and crème brûlée are getting so delicious that non-vegans won’t know the difference. Hopdoddy Burger Bars across Texas are already serving plant-based “bleeding” burger patties.

NO-WASTE COOKING

Proponents of this movement, also known as root-to-stem and nose-to-tail, seek to cut back on food waste by utilizing as much of the plant or animal as possible. While nose-to-tail has been in vogue for some time, root-to-stem cooking makes use of the entire fruit or vegetable, including stems or leaves that are less commonly eaten. Recipes like pickled watermelon rinds, beet-green pesto or broccoli-stem slaw will feature more prominently on restaurant menus and grocery shelves.

SPARKLERS

Get ready for an explosion of sparkling beverages, from flavored water to cold brew coffee. Thanks to the popularity of La Croix, and upon the sale of beloved Topo Chico to Coca-Cola, a couple of Austin-based alternatives have appeared in the market. Waterloo Sparkling Water comes in flavors like coconut, watermelon and black cherry, and Big Swig, the latest newcomer, features key lime and grapefruit flavors aside from a natural option.

MOCKTAILS

High-end, non-alcoholic cocktails are a hot commodity these days. House-made sodas, fruit and vegetable juice blends and other booze-free drinks are also gaining popularity. Austin faves Garage Lounge and Holy Roller are at the top of our list when it comes to these trendsetting libations. At home, you can use the aforementioned sparkling waters as a key ingredient in this drinking trend. ♦