

WHAT'S

*Hot*

2024

CULINARY FORECAST



NATIONAL  
RESTAURANT  
ASSOCIATION





# ALL THE WORLD'S A MENU



Social media is making foodies of us all. The top “Macro Trend” in the 2024 What’s Hot Culinary Forecast—according to more than 1,500 culinary professionals—is incorporating social media trends into restaurant menus and marketing. Making use of platforms like TikTok is top of mind for operators and very much a two-way street when it comes to influence. Viewers help restaurant fare go viral and restaurants riff on online food fads, parlaying them into innovative menu additions or LTOs.

In the food categories—dishes, ingredients, flavors and condiments—comfort and community dominate. Soups and stews, stuffed vegetables, and melty cheeses are classic comfort foods and are a safe way for consumers to sample unique ingredients and flavors from other regions, both domestic and international. Social sharing quickly heightens awareness of regional food discoveries.

When it comes to beverages, energy and health are the keynotes. In the non-alcohol category, beverages that boost energy are in demand, but consumers are increasingly looking for ingredients that boost health, too. The botanicals infusing the cocktail market also carry a health-forward vibe, with easy-to-recognize herbs, berries, flowers and leaves enhancing the flavor and presentation. Low-alcohol beverages, both the commercial brands restaurants sell and the cocktails they create, have a health hook that’s trending well with adults today.

Check out the What’s Hot top picks and take a peek at the emerging trends in each category—are you on track to strike while the trend iron’s hot?





# TOP 10

## TRENDS OVERALL



**1. World Stage Soups & Stews**  
(Birria, Chicken Tom Kha, Laksa, Salmorejo, Upscale Ramen)

**2. Global Chicken Wings**

**3. International BBQ**

**4. Incorporating Social Media Trends**  
(TikTok)

**5. Grilled/Cooked Cheeses** (Provoleta, Queso Fundido, Raclette, Halloumi, Juustoleipa)

**6. Wagyu Beef**

**7. Stuffed Vegetables** (Chiles en Nogada, Stuffed Peppers, Stuffed Cabbage Rolls)

**8. Regional Menus**

**9. Streamlined Menus**

**10. Hot Honey Breakfast Sandwiches**





# FEELS LIKE HOME

## TOP DISHES

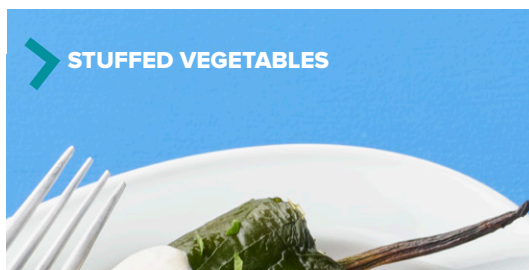
- **World Stage Soups & Stews**  
(Birria, Chicken Tom Kha, Laksa, Salmorejo, Upscale Ramen)
- **Global Chicken Wings**
- **International BBQ**
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**Comfort foods clearly appeal, and nothing says comfort like a bowl of delicious soup or savory stew.**

Soups and stews check all the boxes: they're a safe way for customers to experience new ingredients and unique flavors; they present an economical way to diversify the menu, especially as menus are being streamlined; recipes are super sharable and even viral, as SoupTok attests; and they travel well. Soups and stews track as "healthy," too. Several of these attributes apply to Grilled/Cooked Cheeses, as well. A fun way to experience international specialties, many of these cheesy dishes are intended for group preparation and consumption—that's entertainment, communal connection, and comfort all in one.



GRILLED/COOKED CHEESES



STUFFED VEGETABLES



GLOBAL CHICKEN WINGS





# ROOTED IN FLAVOR



ROOT VEGETABLES



WAYGU BEEF

## TOP INGREDIENTS

- Wagyu Beef
- Root Vegetables
- Birria



A social media darling, chefs are using birria, the spicy, sweet, smoky stew, to elevate tacos, sandwiches, nachos, poutines, pasta, and more. Expect to see more birria on menus in many creative applications.

## EMERGING

- Calamansi (*Philippine lime*)
- Cannabis-Infused Dishes
- Cucamelon (*citrusy cucumber*)



BIRRIA TACOS



# THE HEAT IS ON



## TOP FLAVORS

- Nashville Hot
- Everything Bagel Spice
- Agave Syrup
- Turmeric Ginger
- Hibiscus

Coast to coast customers find Carolina, Kansas City, and Texas BBQ sauces together on the table. They have a choice of Chicago, New York, or Detroit-style pizzas, and can sample local takes on upper Midwest hotdish and low-country boils.

Chefs are looking to regional standouts for inspiration and finding ways to make them their own. Nashville hot is one such standout, a natural flavor to emerge after Fried/Chicken Sandwiches 3.0 topped 2023's Hot list. Agave syrup is another to emerge from a 2023 top trend, alternative sweeteners; it's sweeter than sugar but easier on the glycemic index. Also gaining high marks, hibiscus, with its tart-sweet, cranberry-ish flavor, is a versatile ingredient in everything from salads, to beer, cocktails, and desserts.

## HIBISCUS



## EVERYTHING BAGEL SPICE







## TOP CONDIMENTS

- Chili Crisp
- Tajin
- Chipotle Ketchup

**Much like sriracha, expect to see Tajin proliferate in kitchens.**

A kick on everything from mango to meat, Tajin is traditionally made from salt, dehydrated lime juice, chile peppers, and garlic. Social-shares include Tajin baked into mango fruit leather and Tajin-sprinkled elote.

## EMERGING

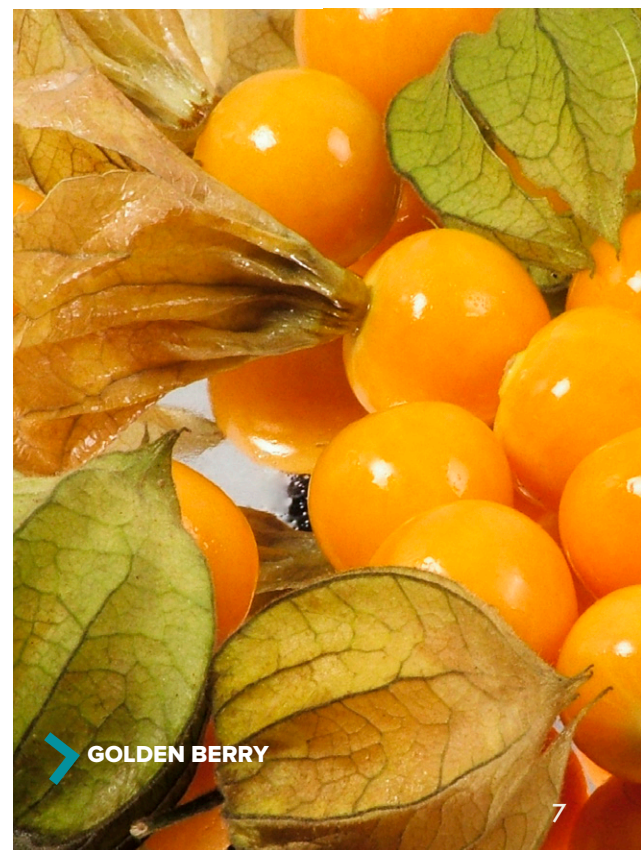
- Tkemali (a tangy, sour Georgian plum sauce)
- Pandan (powdered Asian leaf with hints of rose, almond and vanilla)
- Golden Berry (with hints of pineapple, mango; resembles a tomatillo)



TAJIN-SPRINKLED ELOTE



CHILI CRISP



GOLDEN BERRY



# BETTER. HEALTHIER. TASTIER.



## TOP BEVERAGES

- Nitro Cold Brew
- Energy Drinks
- Functional Waters

The common denominator in non-alcohol beverages is the demand for products that boost energy—but those that promise health benefits in addition to energy are gaining market share fast.

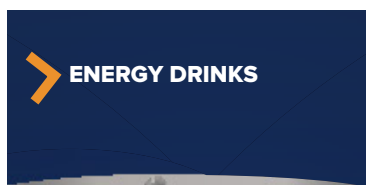
Energy drinks and functional waters touted to enhance focus, improve stamina, help gut health, and ease inflammation claim to contain natural ingredients, vitamins, amino acids, probiotics, electrolytes, and other health-related additives, and they don't forfeit on flavor. These beverages are an easy way for consumers to sample intriguing flavors such as black currant, passionfruit, dragonfruit, elderflower, and hibiscus as well as flavor mashups. In restaurants, the new water offering could be "sparkling, tap or functional?"

## EMERGING

- Zero-Proof Spirits
- CBD Drinks
- Tepache (brewed with pineapple peels)



➤ NITRO COLD BREW



➤ ENERGY DRINKS



➤ TEPACHE



# MOTHER NATURE MIXES BEST



> BOTANICAL COCKTAILS

## TOP ALCOHOL BEVERAGES

- Botanical Cocktails
- Hard Coffees
- Low-Alcohol Cocktails

Consumers are looking for more when they indulge in spirits: more flavor and more *unusual* flavors, more energy, and more options with less alcohol.

Botanical ingredients are popular, elegantly scenting and flavoring spirits with recognizable natural elements (spices, herbs, flowers, berries, seeds, calyxes) that also lend perceived health benefits to cocktails. Health plays a part in the popularity of low- and zero-alcohol versions of cocktails, beers, spirits and wine as well. Restaurants that manage to market high-end low- and alcohol-free cocktails can capture a beverage upsell that has a sweet food cost.

## EMERGING

- Sotol Cocktails
- Pickle Cocktails
- Low-Sulfite, Low-Alcohol Wine



> PICKLE COCKTAILS



> HARD COFFEES



# CLICKING WITH FOODIES



## HOT MACRO TRENDS

- Incorporating Social Media Trends
- Regional Menus
- Streamlined Menus
- Restaurants as Entertainment
- Inventory Optimization

TikTok's impact on food trends and restaurant menus can't be overstated. Through social media and at viral speeds, consumers discover virtually unknown flavors, ingredients, prep methods, and menu hacks.

Restaurant dishes become viral sensations and vice versa—in the right culinary hands, viral “food fads” can successfully translate to menus and LTOs. Social platforms are intrinsic to restaurant marketing today, capturing attention and generating buzz. Social media plays a part too in consumers' awareness of regional foods, both domestic and international. But the fun is not just in adopting the original but rather finding tastier, more creative, more buzz-worthy ways of using regional stars to create original dishes.

## EMERGING

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) Integration
- Augmented Reality
- Monthly Restaurant Subscriptions

## SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS



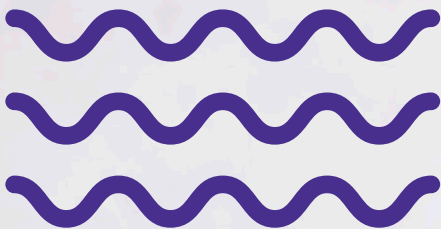
## REGIONAL MENUS



## RESTAURANTS AS ENTERTAINMENT







## METHODOLOGY

Targeted to leaders in the culinary world, more than 1,500 culinary professionals weighed in to tell us what they see as the leading menu trends for 2024 in this year's What's Hot Culinary Forecast. (Survey fielded Oct. 9-23, 2023)

Presented with a list of 120 food and beverage items and industry macro trends curated by the National Restaurant Association, including:

- Dishes & Ingredients
- Flavors & Condiments
- Non-Alcohol Beverages
- Alcohol Beverages
- Macro Trends

For more information, contact the National Restaurant Association [askus@restaurant.org](mailto:askus@restaurant.org)

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