

Culture vultures

Traditional strawberry and chocolate flavour ice creams may still be popular, but different cultures are influencing product development, says Susan R Booton

Take a walk down the ice cream aisle at any given supermarket and you may find yourself overwhelmed with choice. Whether it be super premium, low fat, low carb, sugar free, single flavoured or exotic flavoured, your chances of finding a flavour and product type to suit you are high.

In Europe and the US, chocolate and vanilla are still the top two ice cream flavours. While consumers are beginning to shift towards new flavours and combinations, many people still gravitate toward tried and tested flavours that provide comfort as well as great taste.

According to Mintel International's Global New Product Database, top flavours in new ice cream introductions for 2004 in both the US and Europe included strawberry, caramel, coffee, raspberry, almond and cherry. However, many of the remaining top flavours in Europe were more focused on fruit flavours including peach, pineapple, lemon, orange, and mixed fruits. In the US, non-fruit flavours such as peanut butter, pecan, butter, mint and peanut finished off the list of top new products.

As the ice cream industry begins to shift towards more new product innovation, many new and interesting flavours are starting to hit the ice cream aisle. Many ice cream producers are turning to desserts like those found on restaurant menus to find inspiration for new flavours. Even though many people are looking to trim their waistlines, the indulgent ice cream category is doing very well. Some new ice cream products to hit the market recently include flavours such as apple strudel, crême brûlée, banana cream pie, coconut macaroon and chocolate eggnog.

Turning

Ice cream producers are also turning to ingredients traditionally not associated with ice cream to create a range of new flavour innovations. These ingredients include Ricotta cheese, cantaloupe melon, pears, ginger and green tea. Combining these ingredients with other flavour components such as cinnamon, honey, and even curry and pepper have moved the enjoyment of ice cream into new realms.

So what else is on the horizon for ice cream flavours? A trend driving flavours for the ice cream category in the US is the influence of the growing Hispanic market. Flavours like chipotle, horchata, tamarind and cajeta are beginning to permeate all areas of the food industry. One great flavour that is starting to appear in the ice cream category is tres leches, or "three milks". This is a traditional dessert made from white cake soaked in heavy cream, sweetened condensed milk and evaporated milk. Capirotada is another traditional dish with a great flavour concept.

Common flavourful ingredients included in this dish are star anise, canela (cinnamon), piloncillo (a molasses-like, dark brown sugar),



raisins, sweetened condensed milk and white cheese. Cajeta is an additional versatile and popular flavour. It is caramelised goat's milk that has a rich and distinctive caramel flavour. In combination with apple, cajeta offers a Hispanic twist on the American favourite caramel apple. Horchata, a cinnamon rice beverage, is another flavour that can be successfully translated into ice cream products. The horchata flavour profile combines very well with flavours such as mocha or strawberry for an even richer treat.

Also, as shipping and transportation methods improve around the world, the door opens for many more flavour possibilities as fruits, vegetables, and spices can now be available in almost any part of the world. People are also more open to trying these types of foods as they become more readily available. Fruits like pomegranates, mangos, and guavas are much more commonplace now and could have a number of possibilities in ice cream, sorbets, and fruit ices.

The ice cream aisle is positioned to become more and more exciting over the coming year. With so many new flavour ingredients available as well as a vast number of cultures influencing the mainstream food supply, flavour inspiration is abundant. dii

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