

Up-and-coming

2006 Flavor Trends

FONA's Flavor Radar tracks flavor trends from novel to mainstream

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Flavor trends often can seem to be focused heavily on the nontangible aspects and light on the data and facts. This can be true of trends for many categories, not just flavors. In order to bridge the gap between the two, FONA International developed the Flavor Radar — a flavor-mapping methodology that tracks flavors from being a novel idea to being an everyday pantry staple. FONA's Flavor Radar balances current data from industry-renowned databases with in-depth analysis on how a flavor trend is affecting the food industry. By combining a comprehensive set of indicators, including restaurant menus, new product introductions and print media data, with FONA's expert analysis, predicting flavor trends will become much more clear and precise.

The Flavor Radar encompasses four categories: novel, up-and-coming, mainstream and everyday. The process for determining what flavors to include on the Flavor Radar begins with an initial flavor scan from either a market or industry perspective. This is followed by data mining through the various indicators of restaurant menus, retail product introductions and print media publications. FONA's experts conduct a final flavor scan to identify which flavors have the most category versatility and consumer appeal.

The interesting thing about flavor trends is the progression from novel to everyday. Some flavors that start off as novel never make it to everyday status; however, the progression time frame of those that do make it can vary based on many factors. The versatility of product application in which the flavor appears is a key factor in the progression of a flavor. Additionally, the revitalization factor — the cyclical process of flavors — should be considered when examining flavor trends. Given the latter, there are really two different types of flavors: those that are truly new from a consumer awareness perspective, and those that may be familiar but have been brought back to the forefront in new applications and uses.

For 2006, FONA has mapped a combination of novel, up-and-coming and mainstream flavors. Although up and coming and mainstream aren't as exciting as novel, it is important and necessary in tracking flavor trends to prevent the natural tendency to consider only novel flavors and lose sight of those that are on the forefront of consumers' palates.

Flavors to Watch

Acai berry: The acai berry very well may be the next pomegranate. It hails from the Brazilian rain forest and is becoming well known for its high antioxidant properties, among other things. It recently was featured on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, the *Today Show* and *CBS News Radio*. The flavor profile of the acai berry has been described as a combination of berry with chocolate undertones. It recently has been popping up in beverage brands such as Honest Tea, Naked Juice and Jamba Juice. Additionally, The Rattlesnake Club, a fine dining restaurant in Detroit, is offering an Amazon rain forest artisan sorbet on its dessert menu. The offering features sorbets of Amazonian acai, acerole and mango fruit essences with natural vitamins, drizzled with star anise and

Trend tracking resources

New product: ProductScan Online

Menu data: Mintel's MenuInsights

Print publication recipe data: FoodWatch

cassis-scented orange flower syrup, as well as a wild poppy seed, red chili and sesame tuile. Acai berry is mapped as novel on the Flavor Radar, and it will be interesting to see how it progresses in 2006.

Blood orange: The appeal of blood orange is its vibrant hue and pleasant sweet and tart flavor profile, which is just a bit different than the typical orange. Originally hailing from Sicily, the blood orange recently has become familiar to American consumers because it is now available at local grocery stores. In addition, blood orange recently has appeared on fine dining menus in appetizers, salads, entrées and desserts. Recent features include:

- Baby red oak leaf with black olive blood orange citronette, *Babbo, New York*
- Calamar azteca featuring chili-dusted fried calamari, napa cabbage, baby arugula salad and chipotle-blood orange reduction, *Maya, San Francisco*
- Blood orange sorbet, *Bellini, New York*

From a retail product perspective, blood orange has been appearing mainly in beverage introductions; however, gelato and premium chocolate featuring blood orange have been



introduced. Blood orange is mapped as late novel on the Flavor Radar with an eye toward entering up and coming in 2006.

Kaffir lime (leaves): The kaffir lime tree, growing in Asia and Hawaii, produces a small pear-shaped citrus fruit with glossy dark green leaves. The kaffir lime rind and leaves often are used in Thai and Vietnamese dishes to impart a distinct citrus aroma and flavor. Fine dining restaurants have been featuring kaffir lime in appetizers, entrées and desserts. Aureole (New York) featured a golden pineapple cannoli with kaffir lime and coconut gelato, while Blue Ginger (Wellesley, Massachusetts) featured fragrant Thai mussels with kaffir lime leaf and green papaya.

Many recent product introductions have included kaffir lime on the product's ingredient statement, but not as the main flavor profile. One recent product featuring kaffir lime as the main flavor profile is a kaffir lime with coconut and ginger truffle

from B.T. McElrath Chocolatier. Kaffir lime is mapped as early up-and-coming on the Flavor Radar and is predicted to gain significant attention in 2006 due, in part, to a predicated growth in Vietnamese cuisine.

Meyer lemon: The Meyer lemon was introduced to the United States by Frank Meyer, who worked for the United States Department of Agriculture and brought back a sample while on a trip to China. The Meyer lemon is believed to be a cross between a lemon and an orange, and is described as being sweeter and less acidic than regular lemons. Similar to kaffir lime, Meyer lemon also has been appearing on fine dining menus.

Recent features include:

- Goat cheese tartlet with preserved Meyer lemon, mixed olives and fried artichokes, *Aqua, San Francisco*
- Meyer lemon flan with coconut cookies and tropical fruit, *Mesa Grill, New York*

Meyer lemon is mapped on the Flavor Radar as up-and-coming, with recent product introductions including beverages, cookies and a flavored olive oil. It will be interesting to see the different ways in which Meyer lemon appears in 2006, whether on menus, in product introductions or in your next issue of *Food & Wine* magazine.

Fig: Although fig may seem like nothing new from a cookie perspective, a very different opinion is developing from a culinary perspective. Fig has been cropping up on more fine dining menus in the past year, including Café Boulud in New York, Magnolia Grill in Durham, North Carolina, and Ola in Miami.

Fig is featured most frequently in the entrée course; however, it also has been seen in appetizers, soups and desserts. Fig has been paired with everything from foie gras to lavender duck. It also is presented

frequently as a glaze, chutney or sauce, including a red wine fig sauce, a fig apple glaze and a fig balsamic glaze. Recent recipes from print publications featuring fig include:

- Cornmeal and fig cakes with pine nuts, *Bon Appétit*, May 2005
- Fig and chili glazed pork tenderloin, *Cooking Light*, January 2005

Fig is mapped on the Flavor Radar as up-and-coming and certainly has the potential to enter the mainstream from a culinary perspective in 2006.

Pomegranate: Pomegranate's popularity has exploded throughout the past 18 months due to its promoted health benefits and the introduction of the POM Wonderful beverage, which brought an awareness of pomegranate to most consumers. Interestingly enough, we mainly are seeing pomegranate being featured at fine dining restaurants, including Chaya in Los Angeles and Gotham in New York. From a retail product perspective, pomegranate has been introduced in everything from beverages to salad dressing. Recent introductions include:

- Pomegranate Green Tea (Republic of Tea)
- Pomegranate Flavor Concentrate (Monin Inc.)
- Pomegranate Power Sugar-Free Chewing Gum (Ford Gum & Machine Co.)
- Pomegranate Blueberry Vinaigrette Dressing (Litehouse Foods)
- Pomegranate Truffles (Hauser Chocolates)

Pomegranate is mapped on the Flavor Radar as mainstream and should continue to be featured prominently in both restaurants and product introductions in 2006.

The Flavor Radar provides a complete look at flavor trends by balancing the non-tangible with the tangible in combination with experienced FONA analysis. From acai berry to pomegranate, the Flavor Radar provides insight into flavor solutions that span everything from novel to everyday.

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