

Fusion Flavors

The history of fusion flavors and what is being done with them today

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Fusion flavors, or blends, have been around since the cavemen discovered that a cooked, smoky leg of dinosaur had a much better taste than the raw version. Additionally, the ancient Romans and Greeks used the spices and herbs available to make their food taste pleasant.

Today's marketplace is always looking for something new and exciting to tantalize the palette of the consuming public. To address these needs, the flavor industry is constantly being pursued for new concepts, flavors and taste sensations.

The discovery of superfruits and their nutritional content has given flavor chemists something new to work with. These fruits include mangosteen, acai berry, aronia, lychee, goji and many more. Unfortunately, superfruits are expensive, hard to get, not very tasty, not too stable and difficult to ship from places such as Southeast Asia and South America, where most of them are grown. Because of the difficulties in handling them (with the exception of pomegranate) they are often used in blends or fused with more common fruit juices and flavors. This is where the term "fusion flavors" comes from.

Monks in the 17th century were the first flavor blenders and masters of fusion technology. They made blends using herbs, flowers, seeds, barks, roots, fruits, coffee, tea, peels, sugar, brandy, water, vegetables, and in some cases, wine. These liqueurs and cordials are still consumed today and extremely difficult to duplicate with the essential oils and natural chemicals we use now. Look at, or better yet, sip Benedictine, Chartreuse, Claristine, Curaçao, Drambuie, Grand Marnier, Parfait Amour or Southern Comfort. These are true examples of fusion products.

Reaction products are probably the only scientifically produced fusion flavors. Some people still call them cookbook chemistry, and they are. If you take an amino acid, a sugar, water or oil, some enzymes and other magical secret ingredients, adjust the pH, put in a reactor, heat it to a specific temperature either under vacuum or at room pressure for a specific duration of time, you end up with a flavor completely different from that of the starting materials. We can make meat, chicken, chocolate, malt, etc., in this fashion.

Today's Fusion Flavors

The beverage industry is always looking for a new cola flavor—something different and unique, yet recognizable



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as a cola drink. Cola flavors usually consist of fluid extracts of kola nut, coca leaves, vanilla, cinnamon or cassia. The essential oils of orange, lemon, lime, nutmeg, cinnamon, cassia, etc., are usually blended together and added to the fluid extracts. Then, caramel color, sugar, phosphoric acid and small amounts of caffeine are added. Once the product is mixed well, carbonated and put into a container, it is ready to drink.

It is very difficult to say what a cola flavor tastes like. It is sour, sweet, citrus, vanillalike and sometimes has a spicy cinnamon nuance. It all depends on the manufacturer. This is a true fusion flavor.

Other examples of fusion flavors that have been around for decades are:

- **Chinese Five Spices:** A blend of star anise or anise seeds, cloves, cinnamon, fennel and Szechuan peppercorns.
- **The Holy Trinity:** Used in Cajun foods, it is a blend of chopped up bell peppers, celery and onions.
- **Mirepoix:** A non-Cajun blend of vegetables consisting of carrots, onions and celery.
- **Caramel Candy:** A blend of sugar, butter and cream, heated to a pastelike, semi-soft candy, which after cooking, develops a mouth-watering caramel taste. This could also be considered a reaction flavor.
- **Tres Leches:** A white cake soaked with a blend of three different milk products—milk, evaporated milk and condensed milk. The milks are heated together to create a new milky, creamy taste.

- **Citrus Beverages:** Such as lemon-lime blends. They have been around for years and when properly blended, it is difficult to pick out the lemon or lime. A perfect fusion.
- **Chai Tea:** Made with a blend of spices (clove, cinnamon, nutmeg and coriander) and tea. We mainly taste the spices and hardly any tea. This is not a good fusion flavor.
- **Ketchup:** It has been around for years and is a blend of tomatoes and spices (clove, cinnamon, etc.). This is a very good fusion.

Fusion food blends have been around for centuries.

The concept is an old one that is being reintroduced and revised every day. The excitement today is over superfruits and how to make them taste acceptable, be price-conscious and available to the public.

Actually, with the help of reality TV and the numerous cooking shows featuring “top” chefs, the culinary world has brought attention to new ingredients. Additionally, it sheds light on previously-known ingredients that are being cooked in novel ways.

Flavorists are always looking at different industries to see what and where the next new crossover flavor will come from. It is then up to flavor chemists to use their creativity to make those come to life in unique and useful ways for the industry. One of the latest fusion flavors that the flavorists at GSB Flavor Creators have developed is called Tommango—a tomato flavor blended with a mango flavor.

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