



# Flavor Creation in Russia

Popular flavor profiles among the Russian population, as well as cultural cues

John Wright; johnwrightflavorist@gmail.com

Russians are tough. History—and an unforgiving climate—has taught them the need for self-reliance and fortitude many times over, and the message has clearly hit home. Allied to that toughness is the mitigating counterbalance of a very dry, self-deprecating sense of humor. Where Westerners cherish motivational speeches and posters, Russians often find immense humor in dark, satirical mirror images of our inspirational themes. My favorite Russian “demotivational” poster simply illustrates a children’s playground. The central feature of the playground is a slide. At the end of the slide is an immense pool of stagnant, slimy mud. This is clearly intended to teach small children to adjust at a very early age to the disappointments they will inevitably encounter later in life.

Russian tastes in food naturally fit the harsh climate, but, as is the case in many markets, international brands and tastes are gradually becoming accepted, especially among younger Russians. The areas of taste that are uniquely Russian may be diminishing but are still important. Beef Stroganov is possibly the most famous dish, but my personal favorite is borscht. I love the unusual, almost primeval, earthy note of beetroot, and this dish highlights it to perfection.

## Main Russian Flavor Preferences

In my experience, the most popular flavors in Russia are, in descending order: cream, strawberry, beef, mint, cheese, lemon, orange, chicken, cherry, butter, onion, vanilla, apple,

tomato, ham, raspberry, grapefruit, pineapple, tea and apricot.

**Cream:** Dairy flavors, especially cream and milk, are widely used in a range of end products in Russia. The characters are typically creamy rather than buttery and sometimes have a noticeable sour note.

**Strawberry:** Typical Russian strawberry flavors are often jammy rather than fresh, sometimes with a distinct floral note. The trend is slowly moving toward greener flavors, more in tune with climate and also the rest of northern Europe.

**Beef:** Beef flavors can sometimes be pleasantly roasted in character, but more often they tend toward well-stewed beef, with an attractive, heavy, rather savory background character.

**Mint:** Mint flavors are not especially unique in this market and, more or less, follow international styles with, unsurprisingly, a strong accent on cost. Peppermint flavors in particular can sometimes seem harsh.

**Cheese:** Cheese is quite a popular profile in a wide range of food products, somewhat mild and slightly sour in character.

**Lemon:** Lemon flavors are relatively straightforward and rely to a large extent on citral for their character. High levels of floral notes are not generally liked.

**Orange:** Similarly uncomplicated flavors, with peel notes very much more in evidence than the fruity, juicy notes that are common in much of the rest of Europe.

**Chicken:** Roasted and boiled characters are both in evidence, but boiled chicken is generally preferred.



The emphasis is often on taste effects rather than aroma.

**Cherry:** Cherry flavors are generally fairly realistic and less dependant on almond and fruity notes.

**Butter:** Butter flavors in Russia tend to be quite creamy in character and relatively heavy.

**Onion:** Onion flavors tend to be characteristic of cooked onions in this market and do not often have many fresh notes.

**Vanilla:** Vanilla bean character is appreciated but, nevertheless, many flavors still tend to be dominated by the presence of vanillin. Sometimes balsamic notes are evident.

**Apple:** Apples have been a popular fruit in Russia for many years, and the market values apple profiles that are sweet and juicy, with the harsher skin and raw notes kept to an absolute minimum.

**Tomato:** Most tomato flavors are predominantly cooked in character rather than fresh and tend in many respects toward the profile of tomato puree.

**Ham:** Ham flavors are popular and generally dominated by a smoke character. The smoke note is often relatively heavy and tarry.

**Raspberry:** Sweet, ripe, fruity notes dominate this flavor category, and the profiles are becoming increasingly authentic.

**Grapefruit:** This flavor, while sweet and attractive, often bears more than a passing resemblance to orange, presumably for reasons of cost.

**Pineapple:** Pineapple flavors for the Russian market are generally more in the direction of processed pineapple rather than the fresh fruit and are becoming increasingly authentic.

**Tea:** Tea is a popular beverage and the demand for good quality tea flavors is significant and growing.

**Apricot:** Flavors tend to be pleasantly jammy and fragrant in style and only have relatively restrained fresh, sulfur and skin notes.

## Interpersonal Factors

Personal relationships are often incredibly important in Russia, and much business is conducted on a one-on-one basis. Building trust may take some time, but, to offset this, once trust has been established decisions can often be made very quickly. English is spoken quite widely, especially among the younger generation.

The ability to drink is undoubtedly helpful in Russia, and vodka is an especially useful taste to acquire. One of the most far-reaching reforms in Russia in recent years was the introduction of a vodka bottle with a screw cap instead of a crown cork. Presumably the concept that you could actually leave some unfinished spirit in the bottle for another day had been unthinkable in the days of the Soviet Union.

This tendency to indulge somewhat to excess also extends to food. In any meal the only way to avoid the next helping is to plead complete satiety. Any other conventional excuses, such as dieting, will likely be met with incomprehension. Above all, never admit to being a vegetarian.

Sports are also very important in Russia, and ice hockey in particular is a national passion. I learned to love hockey during my time living in Montreal, and I think it is easily the most exciting team sport on the planet, ideally suited to the bitterly cold winters experienced by both Canada and Russia. In fact, hockey enthusiasm in Russia can sometimes even border on fanaticism.

Additionally, minor bureaucratic impediments, such as red traffic lights, are routinely treated with disdain. Also, political correctness is also not a dominant trait, a factor that often comes into play in many lively discussions.

Russians are also often highly cultured and knowledgeable, especially about their own national literature and rich musical heritage. Unusually, that interest often extends to the

Janus-like artistic endeavors of the relatively recent past. If you ask typical Russians about Shostakovich, they will likely respond with fervor. This kind of passion can often extend to Russian cuisine as well, making their favorite flavor profiles often staunchly defended.

---

To purchase a copy of this article or others, visit [www.PerfumerFlavorist.com/magazine](http://www.PerfumerFlavorist.com/magazine). 