Seasonal Flavors Spice Up Restaurant Menus

Contributed by Mintel
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With Thanksgiving behind us and seasonal festivities just around the corner, consumers are in the mood to celebrate.

As a result, latest research from leading market intelligence provider Mintel finds that restaurant chains are responding to consumer demand by spicing up their menus with fall and winter offerings.

In 2009, food and beverage menu items featuring familiar fall ingredients and flavors, such as pumpkin, squash, apple, cinnamon, caramel and hazelnut increased by 13% from the summer to fall season.

â€œItâ€™s not uncommon for restaurant operators to update their menus to reflect fresh ingredients of each season,â€• notes K Hayden, foodservice analyst at Mintel. â€œThe falling temperatures signal to restaurant-goers that itâ€™s time for a change to their palettes. Words like â€˜harvestâ€™ and â€˜spicedâ€™ are other menu cues that convey fall and winter flavors.â€•

Pumpkin is an especially popular fall ingredient, as its incidence on menus increased by a staggering 161% from summer to fall in 2009. During the same timeframe, squash dishes increased by 150% and menu items flavored with cinnamon and hazelnut increased by nearly 5%, respectively.

Cider also shows seasonal increases. Warm cider drinks have appeared in many of the major coffee chains, Tim Hortons has cider donuts and cider vinaigrettes bring autumnal touches to salads.

Some of the latest seasonal limited-time-offers showing up on menus this year are: Culver's eggnog shake, Denny's gingerbread french toast, Panera Bread's mint crinkle cookie and Sonic's holiday spiced sugar cookie blast.

â€œLast week, Mintel Menu Insights released its 2011 food and menu trends, but the seasonality trend remains constant,â€• adds Kathy Hayden. â€œFor restaurants, seasonal dishes are a natural way to draw interest, but the challenge is not to simply add items to the menu, but to add items that resonate with your current customers and have enough seasonal interest to draw potential guests.â€•

Source: Mintel Menu Insights

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