

Hitting the sweet spot with sweet and savory dishes

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Whether we're talking about appetizers, main dishes, desserts, snacks or even beverages, menu makers and manufacturers alike are pushing the boundaries of recipe development by devising food items boasting complex, layered flavor profiles.

"People are bored with one-note flavors," says Arlene Spiegel, of Arlene Spiegel & Associates, a New York-based restaurant consulting company. "One of the big trends of the past few years has been the goal for food to hit all the taste receptors on the tongue: sweet, sour, salty, bitter and now umami. Many dishes incorporate as many elements as possible — but they have to be in the right balance."

Family restaurant operator Denny's, for example, has attracted wide notice with its periodic Baconalia promotion. The attention-getting bacon-centric menu has featured such selections as a handmade Maple Bacon Milkshake, Maple Bacon Sundae and Salted Caramel Brownie Sundae with Bacon. The lure of bacon as a sweet and savory component also has prompted Burger King to menu its own Bacon Shake and Bacon Sundae while Dunkin' Donuts tapped into its donut roots with its egg and bacon breakfast sandwich served on a glazed donut.

The snack arena is another area in which consumers are welcoming sweet and savory combos. TGI Fridays, for instance introduced



its Happy Hour Snack Mix which includes such flavors as Sweet & Spicy, Cheddar Bacon and Sweet Barbecue.

Meanwhile sweet ingredients are finding their way onto more center-of-the-plate options.

Sweet and savory combinations have proved to be a natural fit for chicken wing concepts across the country. Wing Zone, for instance, menus many unique flavors like Cinnamon Maple or Mango Fire, while Naked Chicken has had a hit with its made-in-house Blueberry BBQ Wing Sauce.

Sweet and savory foods, in fact, are continuing to grow in popularity. "The right balance of sweet and savory can be memorable and satisfying," Spiegel says. "It can hit all areas of taste and be served hot or cold, crunchy or smooth. It can provide optimum enjoyment." ●