

Food Trends

Food is what keeps us going, and entire industries are based upon this basic biological need. Here's a look at some recent and developing food trends that are spreading across the nation.

Eating Locally

This doesn't mean eating only at restaurants in your neighborhood — it's about eating food that didn't travel far to get to your table, wherever your table may be. From fruits and vegetables, which can be grown in your own garden, to meats, fish, poultry, and dairy — finding a source within a couple hundred miles of home is the goal of this movement.

First Lady Michelle Obama planted an organic vegetable garden on the White House lawn in 2009, and it's still going strong. So strong, in fact, she's writing a book about it. Los Angeles Magazine, always on top of food news, put out an "Eat Local!" guide for the L.A. area in 2007. Katie Lee, author of *The Comfort Table*, and *The Comfort Table: Recipes for Everyday Occasions*, has a section on her website that says: "To be truly comforted by your food, you first need to know where it comes from and how it was raised." You can enter your zip code, and localharvest.org finds a list of local food markets in your area. In my area, it brought up Lindy & Grundy's Local, Pastured, & Organic Meats.

This new butcher shop has recently been featured in everything from *Bon Appétit*

magazine to the Los Angeles Times. Farm-to-Table meals have been popping up across the country, with some restaurants focusing solely on this—which means, of course, seasonal, and sometimes even daily, menu changes. People are definitely becoming more interested in where their food actually comes from, and finding that it is fresher and healthier when it comes from nearby.

Quick, Easy Meals

The March issue of the U.S. Vogue profiled cook and author Sandra Lee. She's the creator of the "Semi-Homemade" empire which now includes cookbooks, a magazine distributed in the U.S., and a Food Network television show. Lee is all about minimal time and effort, with the outcome still being a tasty meal. Her recipes call for canned fruit, frozen vegetables, and even Betty Crocker cake mix. Similarly, Rachael Ray hosts the popular "30 Minute Meals with Rachael Ray" on the Food Network. Ray, like Lee, has an impressive resume that includes cookbooks, her own magazine, and, of course, TV shows. While traditional gourmet cooks may not quite agree with the hype these simple techniques and shortcuts get, there is certainly a large market for fuss-free cooking.



Mocktails

What is there to drink, for those who don't "drink"? Often the selection is a shameful offering of unhealthy sodas or boring iced tea. That's enough to drive a person to drink, really. Thankfully more restaurants are coming up with creative mixed drinks—non-alcoholic cocktails, or "mocktails". The Hungry Cat in Hollywood, known for its delectable cocktails made with fresh squeezed fruit juices, has two virgin drinks on the cocktail menu: mint lemonade, and a grapefruit cooler. Luna Park restaurant in Los Angeles also has a few interesting non-alcoholic choices on its drinks list; a rum-free Mojito, fresh strawberry or raspberry lemonade, and a pomegranate cooler. The New York Times ran a piece in February called "Cocktails With a Twist: Zing but No Alcohol". It highlighted Tom Colicchio's New York City restaurant Craft, among others, and drinks like a kumquat-and-fennel smash, and yuzu and rose spritz. They look and sound delicious enough to change the ways of even the most fervent drinker.

A Twist on Tradition

There is definitely a certain comfort that lies in tradition, and lots of other important elements that keep traditions going — to honor one's heritage, and so on. But that doesn't mean we can't, and shouldn't, mix things up a bit. The signature dish of beloved L.A. restaurant Hatfield's is their Croque Madame sandwich. But they sure put a twist on the French

hot ham, cheese, and egg classic. Theirs is made with yellowtail sashimi, prosciutto, and sunny-side-up quail egg, on grilled brioche. Upscale L.A. Mexican chain Lotería Grill makes their flan with goat's milk, and their margaritas with jalapeño chili peppers. These little innovative changes make eating out more fun.

Home cooks can also experiment with contemporary changes to established favorite dishes. Holiday meals are often those most in need of some refreshment, or modernization. This past November, for Thanksgiving, Bon Appétit ran a recipe for Malt-Beer-Brined Turkey — and in December, Porcini Mushroom Latkes (rather than traditional plain potato ones) for Hanukkah. Bringing a new element to a beloved old meal is like accessorizing a favorite little black dress with an of-the-moment piece — you're comfortable, but there's a little excitement there too.

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