

Texas' Whole Foods Market roots out top 5 plant-based food trends for summer

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By Chantal Rice



In Texas, summer's the time for backyard barbecues. So heat up the grill and get to cooking some barbecued ... banana blossoms?

According to Austin-based Whole Foods Market, banana blossoms (the flower that grows at the end of the bunch), barbecued jackfruit, and nut-based cheese will be all the rage this summer. The certified organic grocer recently released its first-ever list of plant-based trend predictions, with the top five trends serving up meat and dairy alternatives ideal for summer munching.

The predictions are rooted in research, with the grocer pointing to a recent study from the Hartman Group, which studies American food and beverage culture, that found 48 percent of consumers seek out plant-based products. Hartman further claims plant-based products “are

no longer a niche lifestyle choice but a prominent feature of mainstream food culture,” with 36 percent of American consumers saying they’re adding or increasing plant-based protein in their diet.

“Plant-based is the grocery category to watch right now as brands continue to innovate by using new ingredients and processes that make plant-based products exciting for shoppers,” says Parker Brody, senior global category merchant for plant-based at Whole Foods.

“And in the laid-back days of summer, we find that customers are breaking out of their routines and are more open to trying something new, whether they’re longtime vegans or just starting to experiment with plant-based eating. So, expect to see gourmet plant-based cheese alternative spreads at picnics and fish alternatives made from banana blossoms on the grill this season.”

The move toward more plant-based foods isn’t new. And even in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, shoppers were stocking their grocery carts with the likes of chickpeas and oat milk. Those trends, along with some more unusual plant-forward ingredients, are likely to continue to be popular with consumers.

Whole Foods’ top five plant-based trends for this summer include:

- **Gourmet alternative cheeses.** Experts say give plant-based cheeses a chance, as they are not the tasteless, oddly textured products they once were. These days, cheesemakers are using nut-based milks and ingredients like black garlic truffle, dill havarti, and chive in their recipes, and replicating dairy-cheese methods to create cheeses with more authentic textures and flavors.
- **Vegan barbecue.** And not just a plain ol’ veggie burger. Plants on the grill are hot this summer, especially in the form of vegan hot dogs, Italian-style sausage, and barbecued jackfruit. Some of these products even include algae-based sausage casings and hickory smoke concentrate to kick up the flavor.
- **Kid-friendly plants.** Arguing with the kids about eating their veggies is a thing of the past, according to Whole Foods, as plant-forward snacks like “meat” nuggets, yogurt tubes, and ice pops get the stamp of approval from picky little ones.
- **Plant-based seafood.** Yep, it’s a thing. The new wave of seafood substitutes is all about texture, with ingredients like legumes and banana blossoms mimicking the flakiness of real fish when grilled. Alternative fish sticks, vegan scallops, and fish-free tuna also rise to the top of the plant-free seafood trends list.
- **Dairy-free dips.** Expect to see some plant-forward spreadable dips and cream cheese alternatives highlighting traditional snack flavors like French onion, ranch, and queso on crudité spreads this summer.