



“Swicy,” a portmanteau of “sweet” and “spicy,” has been trending since 2022. Its proliferation is apparent across multiple food and beverage products and continues to grow.



■ BY AMY MARKS-MCGEE
Trendincite LLC
amy@trendincite.com

The Scoville Surge: Why ‘Swicy’ is Just the Start

Condiments and sauces lead the charge, beverages heat up, and candy joins the spicy movement in our latest Forward Thinking column.

The heat is on. Spicy flavor innovation is surging, driven by adventurous consumers—80% of whom specifically seek spicy sensations—and a younger demographic that demands constant evolution beyond simple heat. This research, from regular contributor Amy Marks-McGee, uncovers the latest trends, from the ubiquitous “swicy” (sweet + spicy) to the emerging “swangy” (spicy + sweet + tangy) and “fricy” (fruity + spicy), providing food and beverage developers, flavor chemists, and food scientists with critical insights on how to layer complexity, leverage global influences, and capitalize on key application areas: condiments, sauces, beverages, and confectionery. -Editor

According to FMCG Gurus’ consumer insights,^a 80% of adventurous eaters specifically seek spicy sensations. Datassential^b states, “Spicy food trends reflect sophisticated flavor development, moving beyond simple ‘hot sauce added’ approaches to integrated spicy food experiences that enhance rather than overpower core

^a<https://www.supplysidefj.com/colors-flavors/bold-flavor-profiles-drive-consumer-engagement-across-indulgent-categories>

^b<https://datassential.com/resource/spicy-food-trends/>

flavors.” Interestingly, Datassential found that younger demographics experience faster spicy food trend fatigue and migrate to newer spicy trends as previous favorites go mainstream. “Swicy,” a portmanteau of “sweet” and “spicy,” has been trending since 2022. Its proliferation is apparent across multiple food and beverage products and continues to grow. Hot honey sparked the swicy movement. Over the past four years, hot honey has surged by 230% on U.S. restaurant menus, per Datassential^c. According to Tastewise^d, social conversations about swicy have increased by 63.35% year-over-year. Kalsec’s research^e discovered that 62% of consumers seek sweet and spicy (swicy) combinations, followed by tangy (53%), salty (51%), and sour (48%) flavors. Condiments and sauces lead the charge, beverages heat up, and candy joins the spicy movement as three key applications driving spicy flavor innovation.

Condiments and Sauces Are A Gateway To Spicy Flavors

Condiments and sauces are a gateway to spicy flavors and experimentation because consumers can customize how much and where to use them. Hot sauces deliver layered complexity and contrast, balancing sweet, smoky, acidic, tangy, and earthy notes. Circana’s survey^f of 1,000 Americans found that 34% consider themselves “hot sauce connoisseurs,” and over half (51%) of Gen Z classify themselves as one. According to Polaris Market Research^g, the global hot sauce market was valued at \$3.79 billion in 2025 and is projected to reach \$7.75 billion by 2034, with a CAGR of 8.55%. Many spices and spice blends originate from diverse global regions, including Asia, Africa, South America, the Middle East, the Caribbean, and the Mediterranean. McCormick identified the Sauce from Somewhere trend in its 2026 Flavor Forecast^h, which is “about embracing and highlighting sauces, dips, chutneys, and spreads with global influence.” Similarly, the National Restaurant Association’s What’s Hot 2026 Culinary Forecastⁱ reported “Consumers want to spice up their meat, seafood, and tofu

with chili-lime, gochujang, and even super-spicy ghost pepper hot honey.”

Brands are developing an array of spicy global flavors for condiments and sauces. Honest Bowl debuted a new line of Fairtrade Asian-inspired condiments, including Gochujang BBQ Sauce, Sriracha Mayo, and Thai Ginger Mayo varieties.

Frankie Gaw, known as Little Fat Boy, the online recipe creator and food writer, teamed up with Fly By Jing to launch Chili Crisp Ketchup. “It merges two beloved condiments for a sauce,” and features maple syrup, seaweed powder, sesame oil, shallots, mushroom powder, soy sauce, peppercorns, and Sichuan chili crisps. La Victoria added a new line of topping sauces to its Mexican-inspired flavor portfolio in three varieties: Chipotle Sauce, Fiery Jalapeño Sauce, and Sweet & Spicy Sauce. Morehouse Foods, Inc. collaborated with Tapatío Foods LLC to launch Tapatío Spicy Yellow Mustard available at select Walmart retailers and online at Amazon. Trader Joe’s unveiled a Bird’s Eye Chile Hot Sauce, also known as peri-peri, which originates in South Africa. McCormick named Aji Amarillo the 2025 Flavor of the Year. For a limited-time this year, McCormick introduced Aji Amarillo Hot Sauce, which “blends tangy heat and fruity sweetness from Peruvian yellow chile peppers and sweet pineapple.” Buffalo Wild Wings and the Marzetti Company partnered to introduce four new hot sauces inspired by the bold flavors used at Buffalo Wild Wings restaurants. The Buffalo Wild Wings Hot Sauces are available in four varieties: Blazin’, Chipotle, Habanero, and Original. For Game Day, Frank’s RedHot added three Wing Sauce flavors: Garlic Parmesan, Pineapple Hawaiian, and Spicy Maple. Additionally, Ghost Pepper



Brands are developing an array of spicy global flavors for condiments and sauces. Honest Bowl debuted a new line of Fairtrade Asian-inspired condiments, including Gochujang BBQ Sauce, Sriracha Mayo, and Thai Ginger Mayo varieties.

^c<https://datassential.com/resource/food-trends-hot-honey/>

^d<https://tastewise.io/foodtrends/swicy>

^e<https://www.kalsec.com/natural-flavor-ingredients/insights/spicy-food-more-than-trend>

^f<https://www.circana.com/post/hot-sauce-market-trends>

^g<https://www.polarismarketresearch.com/industry-analysis/hot-sauce-market>

^h<https://www.foodservicedirector.com/food-beverage-trends/the-mccormick-for-chefs-flavor-forecast-for-2026-is-here>

ⁱ<https://restaurant.org/education-and-resources/resource-library/what%E2%80%99s-hot-in-2026-comfort-health-and-value/>

Ranch joined the lineup of Frank's RedHot Squeeze Sauces. Smucker's will release Sweet Heat Honey in May 2026, exclusively through their food service distributors. Lid & Ladle by Sur La Table^j Sweet Heat & Complex Condiments 2026 trend states, "Condiments are doing more work in the kitchen. Sweet heat-think chili crunch, mango-habanero sauces, and the next evolution of hot honey adds instant personality and layered flavor to simple meals."

Quick Service Restaurants Get Saucy

Sauces are a key to quick service restaurants' (QSR) menus. QSRs have been upping their sauce game with a variety of sauce launches, many of which are spicy. Datassential's research^k finds that 3 in 5 consumers are interested in signature sauces, condiments, or dressings at restaurants, with more than half specifically craving signature sauces (52%). Moreover, Technomic's 2024 Flavor Consumer Trend Report^l reveals that 34% of consumers prioritize a restaurant's sauce and condiment offerings when choosing where to dine. Among millennials and Gen Z, 1 in 4 say they pack their own condiments, especially hot sauce, when visiting a restaurant. Sauces stand out as everyday excitement-drivers,

with Yum! Brands' 2026 What's Next in Dining report^m showing they are 2.4 times more likely to spark consumer excitement than other food items.

Nestlé USA's 2026 Food & Beverage Trends reportⁿ identified "Swangy" & "Swavory:" The Next Wave of Heat as a key 2026 trend, signaling a broader spectrum of flavor. The report points to new heat profiles that add depth, including "swangy" (spicy + sweet + tangy) and "swavory" (spicy + sweet + savory). QSRs are leaning in and introducing a variety of fiery flavor profiles. For example, at the end of 2024, Yum! Brands, parent company of KFC, launched "Saucy," a new fast-casual concept focusing on chicken tenders and 11 signature sauces, inspired by its 11 herbs and spices. In October 2025, the brand introduced a salad option, and Caesar joined the sauce menu. Of the 12 sauces offered, three are spicy—Jalapeno Pesto Ranch, Korean Sweet Heat, and Thai Sweet 'N Spicy. The original location is in Orlando, Florida, and Yum! Brands has since added three more units in Orlando, one in Tampa, with further expansion in the pipeline.

In August 2025, for a limited-time, Panda Express unveiled the Dynamite Sweet & Sour Chicken in partnership with Buldak, the global No. 1 spicy noodle brand from Samyang. The collaboration marks Buldak's first-ever U.S. partnership with a restaurant brand. In October

^j<https://learn.surlatable.com/2026-flavor-trends-we-cant-wait-to-test-try/>

^k<https://datassential.com/resource/food-trends-sauce-trends-signature-sauces-2025/>

^l<https://fortune.com/2025/03/12/1-in-4-gen-z-and-millennials-say-they-bring-their-own-condiments-to-restaurants-especially-hot-sauce/>

^m<https://www.yum.com/wps/portal/yumbrands/Yumbrands/news/press-releases/from+craveable+drinks+to+sauce+rituals+yum+brands+unveils+its+first-ever+food+trends+report>

ⁿ<https://www.nestleusa.com/stories/new-kitchen-trends-2026>



At the end of 2024, Yum! Brands, parent company of KFC, launched "Saucy," a new fast-casual concept focusing on chicken tenders and 11 signature sauces, inspired by its 11 herbs and spices. In October 2025, the brand introduced a salad option, and Caesar joined the sauce menu.

2025, Taco Bell brought back Crispy Chicken classics, including a Burrito, Soft Taco, Strips, and Nacho Fries. The launch was accompanied by Frank's RedHot Diablo sauce, "a creamy mashup of the original Buffalo flavor, Taco Bell's signature Diablo sauce, and spicy ranch." In January, Taco Bell expanded its hot sauce offerings with the Volcano sauce. This sauce is "an evolution of its fan-favorite Lava sauce, billed as a creamy blend of cheese and spices and even more of a kick than its beloved predecessor." Chipotle rolled out a Red Chimichurri sauce in the U.S. and Canada during fall 2025. The tangy, garlicky, and spicy sauce is made with roasted garlic, fresh cilantro, chili peppers, and citrus. At the beginning of the year, Wingstop offered a "Hot Honey Trio" to introduce its new Saucy Sriracha Hot Honey and Sweet Garlic Hot Honey sauces with the original Hot Honey Rub. Technomic^o predicts that the ubiquitous "swicy" trend will continue to evolve in 2026, resulting in additional flavor mashups like "colapotle," chipotle sauce sweetened with cola. Other iterations include maple with kimchi, corn with gochujang, and cayenne with Dubai chocolate.



Beekeeper's RTD Hot Honey Cold Brew Latte features Honduran coffee, aromatic chili, and ethically sourced Oregon honey; courtesy of Beekeeper.

Beverages Are On Fire

Consumers are adventurous. For spicy lovers, many seek spicy flavors in other applications. As discussed in Trendincite's March 2025 trend article^p, "3 Trends To Pay Attention To: Spicy Beverages, Experimental CPGs, and Camu Camu," spicy beverages are emerging. Beverages, both non-alcoholic and alcoholic, are innovating with interesting spicy flavor profiles. From soda to coffee, brands are experimenting. Mr. Pibb by The Coca-Cola Company has been reformulated and repackaged after nearly 25 years, with the new version rolling out this year. The beverage features 30% more caffeine and "a bold, spicy cherry taste with hints of caramel." It will be available in Mr. Pibb and Mr. Pibb Zero Sugar variants. Hot honey remains popular and has spilled into beverages. Mike's unveiled Hot Honey Syrup, optimized for hot and cold drinks. Mike's Hot Honey and AriZona Beverages collaborated on three hot honey-infused AriZona Tea flavors: Spicy Green Tea, Spicy Mucho Mango, and Spicy Watermelon. V8 Spicy Cajun joined V8's limited-edition spicy flavors lineup. Paris Hilton and International Delight teamed up on a



To meet rising consumer demand for bold, spicy flavors, Stoli unveiled Halapeño Pepper Vodka. It is the first Stoli vodka to be produced and bottled in Louisiana.

Sweet & Spicy Creamer "that's hot and a mash-up of opposing flavors." Beekeeper Coffee and Gopuff partnered on the exclusive launch of Hot Honey Cold Brew Latte.

Alcoholic brands are also creating adventurous flavors. Bacardi's Global Brand Ambassador Survey^q revealed that bartenders are leaning toward savory (26%) and spicy (24%) flavor profiles. To meet rising consumer demand for bold, spicy flavors, Stoli unveiled Halapeño Pepper Vodka. It is the first Stoli vodka to be produced and bottled in Louisiana.

Similarly, Absolut Vodka and Tabasco Brand partnered on Absolut Tabasco. It is made from the premium spirit with a natural essence derived from fermented, aged red pepper mash used in Tabasco sauce. South Korea's Ki One Whisky Distillery collaborated with Edward Lee, whisky writer and chef, on the limited-edition Ki One Red Pepper Cask. The single malt ages for three years in casks infused with Hong-Gochu red chili peppers. Inspired by hot dogs slathered in yellow mustard, James Gin

^o<https://www.foodbusinessnews.net/articles/29469-culinary-trends-impacting-innovation-in-2026>

^p<https://trendincite.com/3-trends-to-pay-attention-to-spicy-beverages-experimental-cpgs-and-camu-camu/>

^q<https://www.bacardilimited.com/media/news-archive/connections-local-flavors-and-luxurious-experiences-top-the-2026-bacardi-cocktail-trends-report/>



Rotten expanded its candy range with Spicy Sour Gummy Cruncheez, “that start off sour and then deliver a kick, all while keeping every bite interesting with tons of texture.”

introduced American Mustard. The gin combines juniper, coriander, angelica root, orange peel, bay leaf, caraway, ginger, dried tomato, rosemary, cubeb pepper, licorice root, yellow mustard seed, and gherkin. In February, Beatbox rolled out Chillitas, a new line of four spicy-sweet flavored malt beverages: Chili Mango, Pica Piña, Sandia Loca, and Wild Paloma.

Candy Turns Up The Heat

Consumers’ demand for spicy snacks is not waning, as addressed in Trendincite’s *Perfumer & Flavorist*+[†] “Forward Thinking: Snacks Without Borders,” which appeared in the September 2025 publication. Trendincite’s *Perfumer & Flavorist*+ “Forward Thinking: Unwrapping Confectionery Trends” October 2025 article discussed how consumers crave new experiences, and candy is an ideal canvas for flavor experimentation. Spicy candy is the latest flavor profile to capture consumers’ attention. According to Kerry[‡], the swicy trend is evolving, with hot honey and spicy mango driving double-digit growth in bakery and confectionery products.

Mars was a pioneer in this territory, leaning into the swicy trend with the introduction of Skittles Gummies Fuego, which combines five fruit flavors—Lemon, Mango, Raspberry, Strawberry, and Watermelon with a chili-infused coating. Huer and Frank’s RedHot collaborated

on the Huer x Frank’s RedHot Spicy Gummy Bears, which have been sprinkled with the Original Seasoning Blend. Inspired by Jumex drinks, Jumex has added GoMix gummies to its portfolio, made with real fruit juice. The candy is available in Original Mix and Spicy Original Mix, both of which highlight Guava, Mango, Peach, and Strawberry flavors, with the spicy version dusted in cayenne pepper. Jolly Rancher debuted Heat Wave Gummies featuring a chili-inspired coating in Mango, Pineapple, Watermelon, Lime, and Citrus Punch flavors, designed to “provide a warm, tingly, and fruity experience.” Rotten expanded its candy range with Spicy Sour Gummy Cruncheez, “that start off sour and then deliver a kick, all while keeping every bite interesting with tons of texture.” The gummies contain 58% less sugar than the leading brand and are formulated with allulose and glucose syrup, chicory root, monk fruit, cayenne, and ground pequin chili.

Bon Bon Bum x Tajín partnered on The Mix That Hits, a dippable watermelon and passion fruit-flavored lollipop with Tajín’s chile-lime seasoning. The bubble-gum-filled lollipop includes a separate pouch of Tajín, letting consumers customize each dip. For Easter, Peeps introduced Chili Lime Mango Flavored Marshmallow Chicks, offering a swicy taste with mango, citrus, and a hint of chili heat, available exclusively at Kroger stores.

Dubbed the “ultimate umami crunch,” Raaka and Momofuku have introduced a limited-batch Chili Chocolate Crunch bar. The unroasted dark chocolate bar highlights 54% cacao sourced from the Dominican Republic, infused with chilis, mushrooms, and garlic, with crispy puffed quinoa, pink sea salt, and sesame

[†]Page 26; https://perfumerflavorist.texterity.com/perfumerflavorist/library/page/september_2025/

[‡]Page 16; https://perfumerflavorist.texterity.com/perfumerflavorist/library/page/october_2025

[§]<https://www.kerry.com/about/news-and-media/2026/kerry-launches-taste-charts-2026>

seeds for texture. Panda Express and Compartés have teamed up on a chocolate bar collection inspired by signature Panda Express dishes. The Kung Pao Bar is one of four flavors merging Panda Express' dried chili peppers, crunchy peanut bites, and flaky salt with rich dark chocolate. Not a candy, but a notable new limited-edition product is UK Kellogg's Crunchy Nut Hot Honey Crunchies cereal. The swicy cereal is formulated with "honey-coated golden curls infused with a gentle warmth from chili."

Fricy Is The Evolution Of Swicy

Swicy's rising popularity and staying power is unusually resilient due to its adaptability across various cuisines, according to Charlotte Myer, FreshDirect's SVP of Merchandising. Shannon O'Shields, VP of Marketing at Rubix Foods, believes there is a growing demand for "fruit-forward heat" tropical and citrus fruits like mango, guava, dragon fruit, pineapple, and yuzu, combined with the complex heat from jalapeno, habanero, and chipotle. She states, "Today's consumers, especially Gen Z, are gravitating toward flavor-building spices and chili varieties that bring character, not just burn." Similarly, "Fricy," a portmanteau of "fruity" and "spicy," was reported by the BBC^u as a predicted food trend this year. Sous Chef, the online retailer, saw sales of Mexican Chamoy, a pickled fruit, lime, and chili combination, jump 64%, while Japanese Yuzu Kosho, a fermented blend of chili and citrus, grew 28%. Curtis Gong, Senior Product Development Scientist at Ocean Spray Ingredients, agrees, "Today's consumers want fruit plus something: heat, sour, botanical notes, or other layers that make familiar fruits feel new again. There is growing demand for flavors that are complex, tart, and highly versatile."

Sourness and citrus-driven acidity are increasingly being paired with spicy flavors. Koch Associates^v predicts that sweet and spicy is evolving into Sweet, Spicy & Sour (The Next Swicy) with sour notes such as vinegar, tamarind, citrus, and sumac adding the pop. Likewise, Kitchen Hub^w forecasts Swicy and Sour: Layered Flavors Rule, trending with the rise of sour flavors driven by yuzu, tamarind, calamansi, sumac, vinegar reductions, and fermented citrus.

Consumers love spicy food and beverages, particularly the younger generation. From sweet and salty to fruity to tangy and sour, creativity in spicy flavor pairing is limitless. There's no sign that this trend is waning. In fact, projections indicate that by 2029, 96.3% of menus will feature spicy food items, cementing spicy food trends

as a permanent fixture in American dining, according to Datassential. Flavor suppliers and consumer packaged goods manufacturers will need to continue innovating to meet consumer demand for spicy flavors across multiple food and beverage applications.

Flavor & Product Innovation Takeaways

1. Move Beyond Simple Heat to "Layered Complexity"

Spicy flavor innovation is shifting from a focus on extreme heat to sophisticated, integrated experiences that enhance core flavors. Developers should focus on layering heat with other primary tastes—specifically smoky, acidic, tangy and earthy notes—to create depth rather than just a "burn". Trends like "savory" (spicy + sweet + savory) and "swangy" (spicy + sweet + tangy) are emerging as the next wave of complex heat profiles.

2. Target "Fricy" and "Swicy" across New Categories

The portmanteau "fricy" (fruity + spicy) is a defining 2026 trend, driven by high demand for "fruit-forward heat" combinations like mango-habanero, pineapple-tamarind, and guava-cayenne. Beyond traditional snacks, these profiles are rapidly expanding into unexpected applications, including RTD beverages, coffee creamers, ice cream, and bakery fillings.


3. Leverage "Global Specificity" for Authenticity

Broad regional labels are being replaced by high-demand, locally specific spice sources. Chemists and developers should look to authentic ingredients like aji amarillo (Peruvian yellow chile), peri-peri (African bird's eye chili), gochujang (Korean fermented chili paste), and yuzu kosho (Japanese citrus-chili paste). This shift toward specificity meets the adventurous eater's desire for cultural connection and story-driven products.

4. Prioritize "Sourness and Acidity" as Heat Balancers

Acidity is increasingly used as a tool to brighten and pop heat profiles. Formulations are moving from simple "sweet + spicy" to "sweet + spicy + sour" mashups. Key acidic drivers for 2026 include tamarind, calamansi, sumac and fermented citrus, which provide the "tang" necessary for the emerging "swangy" trend.

5. Combat "Trend Fatigue" in Younger Demographics

Gen Z and younger millennials experience spicy food trend fatigue faster than previous generations, often migrating to newer variations as soon as a favorite goes mainstream. To remain competitive, brands must innovate quickly with limited-time offerings (LTOs) and bold mashups—such as "colapotle" (chipotle + cola) or hot honey-infused coffee—to maintain excitement and social media relevance. 

^uhttps://www.bbc.co.uk/food/articles/2026_food_trends

^v<https://finance.yahoo.com/news/2026-flavor-trend-forecast-140000500.html>

^w<https://www.trykitchenhub.com/post/flavor-trends-2026-textures-layers-and-new-menus>