

# Q&Almonds

with  
**CHEF ROB CORLISS**

## Fillings, Spreads and Dips: Formulating with Almond Butter Continues to Grow in Popularity – Part 2

**Chef Rob Corliss**, owner of culinary consultancy ATE – All Things Epicurean (Nixa, MO), shared his thoughts on why almond butter is an ideal ingredient for product developers and why consumers are craving this form in part one of this Q&Almonds.

“Almonds have a loyal following and established trust among consumers,” said Chef Rob. “With almond butter’s ability to carry flavors, product developers view them as platforms for culinary exploration.”

Now we’ll go deeper into past and present culinary applications created using almond butter as a key ingredient.

**Q** You created prototypes featuring almond butter for the 2019 Institute of Food Technologists Annual Food Expo (IFT19). What inspired the concepts?

**CORLISS** | Our strategic areas of interest for IFT19 were the plant-based movement, experiential eating, clean-label, holistic wellness and sophisticated snacking, and almond butter helped us reach our goals. People from all over the world come to IFT, and it was so energizing to see the response at ABC’s booth when they sampled the products. It’s so fun to share our passion and excitement.

**Q** Tell us about the Almond Yuzu Poppy Seed Bars. What did almond butter bring to the table?

**CORLISS** | When we created our Almond Yuzu Poppy Seed Bars, we wanted a baked almond snack bar with a soft, dense, craveable texture, along with almonds’ signature crunch. We wanted to showcase the new defatted almond flour in a bar format and pair almonds with the on-trend flavor combination of yuzu and poppy seed.

In our Almond Yuzu Poppy Seed Bars, almond butter formed the batter and provided a soft, chewy base. That allowed for a complementary textural play between the soft, chewy base and the crunch from natural sliced almonds, also included in the recipe. The natural sliced almonds also gave high visual cues.

The concept also delivers clean, plant-based protein in a slightly sweet/tart and savory almond snack bar. Snack bars are moving away from overly sweet and evolving toward more balanced, savory profiles with global influences. It all equates to elevated consumer recognition.

**Q** What can you tell us about the Chewy Almond Power Cookie?

**CORLISS** | We’d been watching the growth of breakfast cookies, wafers and bars and started this concept by creating a ‘modern’ almond breakfast cookie. But pretty soon this evolved into an anytime snack designed to be more healthful and a good source of fuel throughout the day. It flips the script on traditional snack cookies with its plant-based focus and surprising combination of almonds and chickpeas. The combination of chickpeas and almonds creates a more complete protein as their amino acid profiles complement each other.



Why did you decide to combine almonds with chickpeas for the Chewy Almond Power Cookie?

**CORLISS** | We consider the cookie a comfort classic with a wellness twist, so not only is the combination of almonds and chickpeas delicious, but they create a more complete protein profile.

We used creamy almond butter in this recipe for a few different purposes. It provided a smooth texture and mouthfeel as part of the cookie dough and was also a superb grounding agent for the chickpeas. It even added signature almond recognition in the form of a zigzag application across the top of each soft cookie.

The cookie also featured blanched almond flour, almond extract to complement the vanilla flavor and heighten the overall almond profile, and chocolate chips for mainstream appeal and natural indulgence. These ingredients brought in a familiar note amidst the new combination of almonds and chickpeas.



Tell us more about the Coco-Java Almond Butter.

**CORLISS** | The goal was to create a bold almond butter spread that could stand on its own as a snack and also be versatile enough to cross into other snack applications as an ingredient or coating. So, we made almond butter the star ingredient here. We've seen in the U.S. that almond butter has had a 17 percent volume growth in retail sales since 2015<sup>1</sup>, plus there was a 28.6 percent increase in almond butter global food introductions from 2017<sup>2</sup>, so flavored almond butters are continuing to increase in popularity.

Specifically, we worked with creamy California almond butter along with almonds, chocolate in the form of cacao nibs and cocoa powder, and espresso powder—a powerhouse trio and a proven consumer favorite. Coconut added even more on-trend appeal and a complementary flavor.

Overall, the spread delivers a clean, plant-based protein that's indulgent and bold yet entirely in line with better-for-you trends. If you took out the coconut sugar – used for mild natural sweetness – the spread could even tap into keto snacking trends. But what this concept really shows is that almond butter continues to be a growth vehicle via savory flavor introductions.



What ideas do you have around flavored almond butter as a standalone snack?

**CORLISS** | Almond butter is such a naturally elegant, almost sophisticated flavor that it makes a great blank canvas that you can add a taste of the unexpected to. And thanks to its slight sweetness you can afford to use less sugar in the flavored-butter formulations. We've created a lot of flavors over the years, tapping into current trends and looking ahead to anticipate potential winning flavors three years out. Some flavored almond butter examples we've worked on are Five-Spice Dark Chocolate Crunch Almond Butter Dip, Dark Chocolate Tahini Almond Butter, Power Protein Almond Butter, Mango Masala Almond Butter with pink peppercorns and curry and Everything Almond Butter Spread.

There are more trending ingredients to pair with almonds and that are on my radar including: seeds, grains, bold spices, seaweed, fermented ingredients, medicinal mushrooms, florals or botanicals and exotic fruit powders. I also foresee opportunities for running limited-time seasonally flavored butters, or maybe packaging different flavored butters with different snacks to dip or spread—cookies with a sweeter butter, or crackers and pretzels with a more savory one.



We've been talking about almond butter, but what other almond forms are keeping you busy?

**CORLISS** | We work with all almond forms, but one that was new to us this year was the defatted almond flour. We found the attributes of the defatted almond flour ideal for our Almond Yuzu Poppy Seed Bars, including its protein content, extra-fine texture that provided a smooth and light bar, and, unlike a lot of plant-protein sources, it didn't require any masking flavors. Its naturally appealing almond flavor allowed other flavors to shine through.

In fact, across all the almond prototypes we work on, there are always at least two, perhaps three, different forms of almonds in there. That showcases their versatility, yes, but it also makes sense strategically because each ingredient provides something functional to the overall formulation.

**For more information on why consumers and product developers are enjoying almond butter, check out Part 1!**

#### References

<sup>1</sup>US Retail Product Movement Study. Nielsen. 2018.

<sup>2</sup>Almond Butter Attitudes & Usage. Sterling Rice Group. April 2018.