

Is Greek yogurt the new cocktail sauce? 5 classic flavors and how to update them

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The tried-and-true tastes are good to have, but experts share ways on updating them to sell more seafood.



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Beer battered fish and shrimp with cocktail sauce are perennial favorites on menus, but a recent flavor study by food industry consulting group Technomic showed that consumers yearn for bold new ideas, too.

"Technomic's most recent flavor findings also signal the need for operators and suppliers to stay on top of flavor trends by reinvigorating classic offerings with new and unique twists."

A whopping 73% of consumers surveyed said if they try and like a menu item with a new, innovative flavor, they would be highly likely to return to the restaurant for the same menu item. "In a competitive foodservice climate, flavor differentiation is a must-have for operators," says Darren Tristano, executive vice president at Technomic. "Because today's foodservice consumers have such a strong expectation for innovative flavors,

operators and suppliers have to help the menu stand out by staying ahead of the flavor curve. Knowing which flavors are up-and-coming and truly enticing to guests will be essential in gaining their dining-out dollars."

Seafood International enlisted experts to curate five tried-and-true traditional classic seafood flavors -- and five ways to update them to draw in consumers looking for new, bolder flavors.

The Classics ...

1. Tartar

You would be hard-pressed to find a fish and chips shop that doesn't offer vinegar, ketchup or tartar sauce as an accompaniment to its fish. "Tartar sauce is a classic for a reason -- it works really well and has mainstream appeal," Rob Corliss, US-based chef and founder of ATE (All Things Epicurean), told **Seafood International**.



2. Sriracha

It's not exactly a "classic," but the Thai hot sauce, made from chili pepper paste, has become wildly popular in the past few years.

Seafood companies such as Slade Gorton and Clear Springs are jumping on the train as well -- earlier this year, the latter launched "spicy Sriracha whole grain rainbow trout treasures." According to a Technomic study from November 2013, Sriracha is on trend with what consumers are asking for in all foods today. For the first time a majority of consumers --54% -- surveyed said they preferred hot or spicy foods.

... and How to Update Them

1. Aioli

With a less traditional recipe model, aioli allows chefs to be more revolutionary with sauces. "Many creative dips, like a malt-vinegary aioli or accents like an herby-citrus gremolata topping add an extra flavor boost as well as regional or global ties," Cathy Holley, editor-in-chief of *Flavor & the Menu*, told **Seafood International**.



2. Gochujang

While Sriracha is still incredibly popular, Holley said gochujang, a Korean paste made from chili, is becoming trendy as it is "following in Sriracha's wake." She said interest has been growing in fried seafood bites or fritters, and "these represent a big opportunity to offer new flavors in experimental menu formats and can lend themselves to more aggressive flavor accompaniments such as ginger or gochujang. This has the potential to open up flavor opportunities with other seafood dishes like fish sandwiches or grilled filets," she said.

3. Cocktail sauce

A popular option for fresh shrimp, cocktail sauce is "a timeless dip," Corliss explained. "New versions may add Sriracha, a bloody Mary-inspired base, homemade ketchup or wasabi." Even QSR chains such as Popeye's took on the trend, offering a limited-time Butterfly Shrimp Tackle Box with cocktail sauce during its Lent promotion.



4. Citrus

A true classic in terms of seafood flavors, "citrus is a quintessential pairing with seafood," Corliss said. "It accentuates taste, adds depth and

freshness. It also balances fat and sweetness." Shaw's Crab House Executive Chef Peter Balodimas told Seafood International he likes to keep his seafood dishes traditional, and that means a lot of citrusy flavorings. He always includes "some type of citrus that keeps it real light and bright," he explained. Corliss said adding citrus "upscales a classic flavor. It is a low cost point of flavor entry for operators, providing big impact."

3. Greek yogurt

Greek yogurt has surged in popularity, especially in the United States, in the past decade -- but it's not necessarily the first thing consumers think of when it comes to seafood preparations. "Chefs have been working their culinary magic adding fresh and bold flavors to yogurt to make new age sauces, smears and dips for seafood," Corliss said. "This like other seafood trends plays into health and wellness cues."



4. Infused oils

Infused oils are another substitute in line with health and wellness trends, according to Corliss, who said seafood "sauces" can fit that mold, too. "One of my favorite ways to dress seafood is with hand crafted, unique infused oils," he said. "A little goes a long way and the flavor and visual appeal is stunning." Examples, he said, are chive-lemongrass oil -- a blend of olive oil, lemon juice and sea salt or shell oil -- which infuses the flavors of shrimp, crab or lobster shells -- "in quality oil, add aromatics and a pinch of sea salt, strain and use."

5. Beer batter

A traditional favorite for fried seafood, most prominently fish and chips, "beer has been a batter mainstay," Corliss explained. Especially popular for seafood dishes such as fish tacos or shrimp, everyone from fast-food chains such as Del Taco -- which has beer battered tacos -- to Icelandic USA -- which offers beer battered popcorn haddock -- have products following the trend. "Modern day taste buds open up the door to an array of regional and seasonal craft beers to pair with seafood flavorings," he said. "Craft stylings across all forms of alcohol are exploding - think whiskey, tequila, moonshine, hard cider."

5. Grain batter

With many consumers on the lookout for healthy versions of traditional favorites, especially when it comes to seafood, Corliss and Holley said newer battering methods are on the rise. Crusts with seeds and grains are on the rise, Corliss said, featuring quinoa powder, chia seeds, brown rice flour, hemp seeds or garbanzo bean flour and lightly dusting the seafood "adds a big flavor impact." Holley agrees, saying she is "seeing chefs enhance the flavor profile of batter," which began a few years ago with panko breading and artisan beer batters but has moved to "extra flavor upgrades from spices and seasoning such as cumin or achiote, not to mention coating treatments like soda batters."

