

GETTING ON BOARD WITH CHARCUTERIE TRENDS

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Lest anyone think that charcuterie has reached a pinnacle as a trend, it seems that consumers, retailers and CPGs are just scratching the surface of the serving board.

For instance, just a few months ago, Batavia, Ill.-based Aldi revealed that it had assembled a Charcuterie Board of Directors, comprising various food experts.

“As the weather warms up, we know people are eager to kick off spring and summer entertaining,” says Kim Brazington, “Cheese Queen” on the board and Aldi’s buying director for cheese. “Charcuterie boards are the perfect way to impress, with delicious and affordable board options that you can customize in a variety of ways.”

Food industry expert Sharon Olson, executive director of Chicago-based *Culinary Visions*, which regularly surveys consumers and opinion leaders on food industry trends, agrees that charcuterie reflects broader ways of eating and entertaining. “These boards have definitely not peaked,” she says. “If anything, they are gaining momentum as shareable gourmet snacking experiences. Shared food experiences feed the need for connection that American consumers crave today.”

Because of the inherent variety on a platter or board filled with foodstuffs, charcuterie is a popular dish for entertaining, especially as the spring and summer entertaining season



approaches. According to Lauren Edmonson, category manager, perishables, at Dom’s Kitchen & Market, in Chicago, there’s a little something for everyone when it comes to these kinds of arrangements. “Our charcuterie category continues to grow even as people become more health-focused,” notes Edmonson. “Charcuterie is an indulgent treat, great for entertaining, and we’re excited for people to celebrate again.”

Putting It All Together

Traditional and technically, charcuterie refers to the art of arranging cured or specialty meat products and serving them on a platter or board. It owes its name to the French culinary style that focuses on preserved meats.

At Dom's, Edmonson says that classic charcuterie components remain popular. "A hallmark of our charcuterie program is our freshly sliced meats," she adds. "Our signature prosciutto, Levoni's Prosciutto di Parma DOP 24 Months, is sliced ever so thinly, in-house, by our team on a Berkel Volano Flywheel slicer." The team also freshly slices charcuterie from Molinari, a famous San Francisco deli.

Over the past few years, the notion of charcuterie has broadened from basic meats, cheeses, fruits, nuts and chocolate to include various specialty foods that are skillfully assembled and served. Today's charcuterie boards are piled with everything from chocolate-covered blueberries to marshmallows to plant-based cheeses.

As part of its "2022 Food Trends Report," The Kroger Co. highlights the ever-evolving possibilities of charcuterie. "Boards have branched out beyond appetizers to offer consumers a variety of small portions to make the most out of every meal," the company's food experts assert. "As 'boardies' start or end their day, breakfast and dessert boards open a world of flavors without the commitment to a single dish."

Aldi's Charcuterie Board of Directors recently had some fun with this topic, projecting ideas for boards that might catch on with shoppers in 2022. Those concepts include boards made of French fry forms like tots, waffle fries and veggies fries; melted cheese boards consisting of cheese in fondue pots or mini-grilled cheese sandwiches; pickle-focused platters spotlighting pickled vegetables and fruits; and charcuterie for kids, with platters teeming with fruits and vegetables in fun shapes and patterns, among other items.

According to Brazington, there's room for traditional, inventive and seasonal experimentation with board components. "We also expect to see salad boards taken to the next level as the perfect pairing for grilling out," she predicts. "Think charred lettuce cups surrounded with toppings, including items like our Emporium Selection Honey Goat Cheese log or fresh marinated mozzarella for a DIY chopped salad."

The parallel interest in charcuterie and globally inspired cuisines can also be reflected in ideas for charcuterie. "Although travel is opening up, boards with international flavor themes can offer a world of taste experience at home," says Olson.

Charcuterie boards may be known for different types of rich and indulgent foodstuffs, but there's a growing number of options for health-minded consumers and those who adhere to plant-based diets. Grocers can suggest focusing on nutrient-packed vegetables, fruits and nuts, and let customers

know that they can incorporate plant-based cheeses or meat alternatives like vegan salami.

Meanwhile, although many people continue to buy foods for at-home use, not all consumers want to do the heavy lifting. In recent years, convenience-oriented charcuterie products have emerged, such as the fully arranged Charcuterie Tasting Board from the Columbus Craft Meats brand of Austin, Minn.-based Hormel Foods, and a new line of Enjoy AperiTime trays from Logan Township, N.J.-based Veroni. In late 2021, Hayward, Calif.-based Columbus launched three new collections for the holidays and in February, the brand rolled out a new integrated marketing campaign, Like This, showing consumers how to create boards and bites.

Curating Choices for Shoppers

Even as brands like Columbus and Veroni offer charcuterie-ready products and ingredients, grocers can position themselves as charcuterie resources, both from offering and educational standpoints.

Olson offers some suggestions. "Supermarkets can get ideas from creative customers who are posting pictures of their own creations," she observes. "These ideas can inspire in-store merchandising of items that work together and have widespread appeal."

She also emphasizes the important role that in-store culinary staff can play in enticing shoppers to load up on charcuterie goods and have fun arranging them. "Supermarket chefs are a great resource to offer patrons," she remarks. "For example, a chef-curated box of ingredients and a video tutorial can inspire sales. Boards are a great subject for no-cook cooking classes for busy food-savvy customers."

Given the variety of today's charcuterie platters, grocers can promote and merchandise charcuterie across different departments. "It is also an opportunity to think beyond savory components and explore dessert boards with bite-size indulgences from the bakery, and fresh seasonal produce," Olson points out.

Across the grocery landscape, food retailers are positioning themselves as charcuterie pros. For example, as part of its new store slated to open this fall in Oconomowoc Wis., Milwaukee-based Sendik's Food Markets is bringing in certified cheese professionals to help shoppers create custom charcuterie boards. When The Giant Co. revamped its store in Camp Hill, Pa., a couple of years ago, the Carlisle, Pa.-based retailer added a charcuterie station.

At Aldi, Brazington says that charcuterie applications are often a two-way street. “As always, we love when our fans share their creations and can’t wait to see what inspiration they provide in our Aldi Insiders Facebook Group,” she notes.

Digital platforms can also be designed to help shoppers figure out how to build the board they want. For example, Grand Rapids, Mich.-based Meijer brings online shoppers to a page to help them “create a charcuterie for sophisticated snacking.” There, customers can pick from such items as grapes, cheeses, meats, crackers and breads, nuts, produce, and more.

The study findings suggest that a well-considered takeout and delivery program can build awareness for restaurants, with 70% of respondents saying they have learned about new restaurants because of a unique takeout offering. Trial of new items can be encouraged by the takeout menu as well. Seventy-nine percent reported that they like to try new things on the restaurant’s menu when they order meals to go. There is no denying the convenience of delivery for the majority of those who participated in this survey. Yet, delivery is also an opportunity to build customer relationships as 82% of survey participants said they prefer to order directly from a restaurant rather than a delivery service.