



ANN BLOOM
IT'S ALL GOOD

Food trends: Looking back, and ahead

If last year's pandemic and forced work-at-home time taught us anything it's that many of us turned to food as a way of coping and for comfort. Not just for sustenance, but also as a creative outlet (think of all the people who learned to make bread and sourdough starter). There was an increase in sales for pots and pans, cookbooks, kitchen gadgets and tools.

Some of those trends continued into 2021 and some will continue into 2022 and beyond. Though no one has a crystal ball and can truly predict what will appear as a trend for 2022, it is still interesting to look back at the food and health trends of 2021 and to look ahead at what 2022 may have in store.

In 2021, along with an increase in baking, people turned to cooking from scratch and meals made from pantry staples. This was due, in part, to save money and because many restaurants were still closed due to the pandemic limiting the number and availability of places to dine.

Cooking focused on mental as well as physical health, specifically the need for nutrients. Nutrients such as Vitamin D and B vitamins encourage mental and emotional health and may help fight depression. Vitamin D, sometimes called the sunshine vitamin, is found in fortified milk, fortified cereal, fatty, cold-water fish such as salmon, mackerel and sardines, egg yolks and some organ meats. Vitamin C is found in most citrus foods, strawberries and broccoli and leafy green vegetables. As an antioxidant, Vitamin C helps support a healthy immune system. Iron and B vitamins are all found in meat, fish, poultry, eggs, legumes and nuts. And cooking was therapeutic. It relieved stress and was creative.

People also turned to comfort foods. Although comfort foods have always been a way of life for most of us, they became even more important as the pandemic turned everyone's world upside down. Foods such as macaroni and cheese, biscuits and gravy, pancakes and meatloaf with mashed potatoes somehow tasted better than ever before.

With time to spend in the kitchen, people began experimenting. They experimented with different herbs and spices in cooking along with different types of mushrooms, and oils such as pumpkin seed and avocado, and sugar alternatives like maple and coconut.

People were also trying different milk alternatives such as oat, coconut, almond and hemp.

Home preservation increased in popularity and there was a shortage in home canning supplies such as jars and lids. The home preservationist moved beyond canning, trying fermentation and canning quantities of sauerkraut, pickles and kimchi (a type of Korean fermented cabbage), along with drying fruits, vegetables and herbs for later use.

Businesses were closed, but local support of farms and local farmers' markets increased, and money was put back into communities.

As 2021 draws to a close and 2022 begins, some of the health trends that began in 2021 will continue into the new year.

The frozen food market, which held steady, is continuing to increase for several reasons, among them convenience, and budget. Improvements have been made in processing and frozen foods can taste on par with their fresh counterparts. Too, frozen foods are quickly processed. Since they do not have to travel hundreds, or even thousands of miles like their fresher counterparts, the nutrients of frozen fruits and vegetables are more intact. In terms of nutrition, it is important to remember that all forms of fruits and vegetables — fresh, frozen, dried, canned or 100 percent juice — are all nutritious and are part of a healthy diet.

Companies will continue to try different milk alternatives going into 2022, using grains like barley. These milks are a good option for people with lactose intolerance since they are more easily digested. However, unless fortified, they lack the calcium and other nutrients of regular dairy milk.

Nutrients, no matter what year it is, will continue to be important for general good health. Nutrients for mental, physical, emotional and gut health will never go out of style. A balanced diet of whole grains, fruits, vegetables, proteins (meat, poultry, fish, beans, nuts, legumes and plant-based protein) and whole grains along with healthy fats provide the vitamins and minerals needed to maintain one's health.

And as far as the baked bread and comfort foods go? Yes, they'll still be popular in 2022.

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Cookies:

From easy to complicated



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

Chocolate-dipped orange shortbread.

By **DANIEL NEMAN**
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

With everyone concentrating on the gifts they plan to give others at this time of the year, we often overlook the smallest of gifts that are always received warmly.

I'm talking about cookies. The holiday season is nothing if not a time for the baking, giving, receiving and especially consuming of cookies. They are a vital part of the season's festive spirit, a way to spread cheer and make the days merrier and brighter.

And they are so easy to make, or at least some of them are. With a good cookie — and is there really such a thing as a bad cookie? — the ratio of joy they bring to the recipient to the labor of baking them is off the chart.

This holiday season, I made eight batches of cookies. They range from very easy (sugar cookies) to decidedly complicated (hazelnut crunch bars), but they all fill you with that sparkling holiday spirit, and calories.

The procedure for making them all is basically the same: You cream butter and sugar, add vanilla and maybe an egg or two, and gently mix in flour, possibly baking powder or baking soda and perhaps a flavor such as cinnamon. Then, bake as directed.

It's hard to believe that so many different types of cookies can be made from this one fundamental outline.

Here are the eight I made:

- **Sugar Cookies:** The Big Bang of cookies, the cookie from which all other cookies were born. Simple and classic, they are the best way to make sugar and butter crunchy, especially when flavored with a splash of vanilla. If you choose to top them in royal icing, you'll add not only bright color but also an irresistible crisp top that brings textural contrast to the soft cookie.

- **Danish Butter Sandwiches:** Think Oreo, but even better. Two delicate and light butter cookies surround a slightly nutty brown butter filling. They are kind of perfect this way, but if you don't want the hassle of making the crème filling (or you just love butter cookies, which is understandable) the cookies by themselves are absolutely marvelous.

- **Chocolate-Dipped Orange Shortbread:** Soft and crumbly shortbread is a traditional holiday favorite. It's a classy cookie, quietly understated, that encourages the flavor of butter to shine through. You wouldn't think it could be improved, but a bit of orange adds intrigue and makes it even more appropriate for the



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

Sugar cookies.

holiday. Dipping it in chocolate only increases its elegance.

- **Sugar-Topped Molasses Spiced Cookies:** Call them gingerbread cookies if you must, because that's what they are, but these sugar-topped molasses spiced cookies have an intriguing twist. A sprinkling of black pepper gives them a delightfully unexpected bite that acts as a contrast to the brown sugar and molasses.

- **Pecan Squares:** These combine the best aspects of pecan pie with those of a cookie. Instead of a crust, a buttery shortbread is just the right thing to serve as a base for a pecan-pie topping. The earthiness of the nuts is balanced by a blend of maple syrup, honey, brown sugar and cream; it all blends into a marvelous three-bite treat.

- **Cinnamon Bun Cookies:** Some evil genius took the heavenly and seductive flavor of cinnamon buns and figured out how to transfer it to a cookie. A swirl of sweetened cinnamon runs through these simple yet exquisite vanilla cookies, and they are made even better by an enchanting glaze brushed or drizzled on top.

- **White Chocolate Chunk Macadamia Cookies:** The actual cookie dough is superb, even for a chocolate chip cookie; it begins with just enough ground oatmeal for flavor and texture, and corn syrup for chewiness. But then you add the always-delectable combination of macadamia nuts and white chocolate, and you end up with an unbeatable super-cookie.

- **Hazelnut Crunch Bars:** Decadent and indulgent, these spectacular bars are worth the effort. They have four distinct layers, each better than the next. The bottom is a mixture of hazelnuts, milk chocolate and, for a lightly crispy texture, Rice Krispies. Then comes a rich, soft caramel. A soft cloud of sweet homemade

marshmallow floats above the caramel, and it is all topped with an impossibly silky chocolate ganache.

SUGAR COOKIES

Yield: About 24 servings

2 cups granulated sugar, divided
2 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
14 tablespoons (1 3/4 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 large eggs
Royal icing, optional

1. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 350 degrees. Spread 1/2 cup of the sugar in a shallow dish for coating and set aside. In a separate bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder and salt together, and set aside.

2. Beat the butter and remaining 1 1/2 cups of the sugar together in a large bowl using an electric mixer on medium speed until light and fluffy, 3 to 6 minutes. Beat in the vanilla, then the eggs, one at a time, until combined, about 30 seconds, scraping down the bowl and beaters as needed.

3. Reduce the mixer speed to low and slowly mix in the flour mixture until combined, about 30 seconds. Give the dough a final stir with a rubber spatula to make sure it is combined.

4. Wet your hands with water, and roll 2 tablespoons of dough at a time into balls, then roll in the sugar to coat. Lay the balls on two parchment-lined baking sheets, spaced about 2 inches apart. Flatten the cookies with the buttered bottom of a drinking glass, then sprinkle any of the remaining sugar over the flattened tops.

5. Alternatively, roll out the dough 1/4-inch thick, sprinkle with some of the sugar that was set aside for coating and cut into festive shapes with cookie cutters. Place on baking sheets spaced 2 inches apart.

6. Bake the cookies, one sheet at a time, until the edges are set and just beginning to brown but the centers are still soft and puffy, 10 to 12

minutes, rotating the baking sheet halfway through baking.

7. Let the cookies cool on the baking sheet for 10 minutes, then serve warm or transfer to a wire rack and let cool completely. If desired, top with royal icing.

Per serving: 309 calories; 14 g fat; 9 g saturated fat; 67 mg cholesterol; 3 g protein; 44 g carbohydrate; 44 g sugar; no fiber; 111 mg sodium; 20 mg calcium

— Adapted from "The America's Test Kitchen Family Cookbook"

DANISH BUTTER SANDWICHES

Yield: 24 servings

8 ounces (2 sticks) plus 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided
3/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1 large egg yolk
2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
1 1/4 cups powdered sugar, sifted
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
About 5 to 6 teaspoons heavy cream

1. Adjust racks to top and bottom thirds of oven and preheat oven to 325 degrees. Line 2 cookie sheets with parchment paper or foil.

2. In the bowl of an electric mixer, cream 2 sticks (8 ounces) of the butter. Add the brown sugar and beat to mix. Add the egg yolk and beat to mix. On low speed, gradually add the flour, scraping the bowl with a rubber spatula and being just until the mixture holds together in a ball.

3. Place a long sheet of waxed paper in front of you. Use a slightly rounded spoonful of the dough for each cookie and place the mounds of dough on the waxed paper, making 48 mounds.

4. Roll the dough between your hands into round balls and place them 1 1/2 to 2 inches apart on the lined cookie sheets. With the heel of your hand or your fingertips, flatten each ball into a round cookie about 1/4 inch thick.

5. Have a little extra flour in a cup or bowl. Dip a fork into the flour and press the back of the tines firmly onto the top of the cookies, forming