



**TOP
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**HOT AND SPICY
MENU ITEMS**

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HOT AND SPICY MENU ITEMS

Crank up the heat in your kitchen and bring on the spicy flavor twists that today's customers crave. Experiment with Sriracha, harissa, chipotle and exotic peppers in menu items from appetizers to entrées, from spreads to salads.

Add sizzle to your menu with these Top 10 Hot and Spicy ideas.

Bring the Heat

Spicy flavors are “hot” in more ways than one! Demand for hot and spicy foods is growing in all age groups, led by Millennials, according to Technomic research. The spicy callout is still growing on fast-casual menus, up about 3% from the first quarter of 2014 to the first quarter of 2015.

Hot sauces such as Sriracha, the vinegar-garlic-chile blend from Thailand, provide a popular and easy way to add a dash of instant heat. As the hot and spicy flavor trend continues, diners will be drawn to more innovative uses of spices and peppers as well. A constant search for new flavors is part of what restaurant consultants Baum+Whiteman dubbed “restless palate syndrome,” a top trend for 2015.

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Choose Your Firepower

Diners are increasingly knowledgeable about spicy foods, often knowing the heat levels of different peppers, according to research firm, The NPD Group. The trend includes pungent, pickled ingredients like kimchi, as well as global spice blends, such as the Japanese seven-ingredient spice blend, shichimi togarashi. Here are some ideas for using those different levels:

Sriracha

- Add a drizzle of Sriracha to chicken and fish sandwiches or breakfast sandwiches and burritos.
- Try a Sriracha-laced vinaigrette on a salad of baby greens, wonton strips, mango and roasted corn, topped with grilled shrimp or seared salmon.
- Glaze fish with a blend of Sriracha, Dijon mustard and honey; bake and top with the same sauce mixed with Greek yogurt; serve with quinoa and mixed veggies.

Peppers

- Experiment with bold new taste sensations imparted by peppers including habanero, serrano, shishito and ghost peppers.
- Sample ethnic sauces such as harissa (Tunisian hot chile-pepper paste) and sweet chili sauce.
- Offer a fiery ghost-pepper sauce as a dip for chicken wings.
- Add intrigue by combining an exotic pepper such as shishito or ghost pepper with more familiar jalapeños or chipotles to create your own signature blended-pepper sauce.



Make It Sweet and Hot

Balance spice with sweet or savory flavors. Use spice blends during the cooking process. Pair entrées with fresh fruit and boldly spiced veggie purées.

- Serve ancho-dusted seared shrimp with a puréed sauce of roasted corn and carrots and a colorful farro salad.
- Add a kick to pasta with a vibrant sauce of puréed kale, avocado, pistachios, garlic, a dash of dried red pepper and crumbled bacon.
- Take sausage into new realms by flavoring it with sweet-heat combinations of habanero/mango or chipotle/maple-syrup.
- Try a pressed sandwich with spice-roasted veggies, melted fontina cheese and sweet-hot ancho-chile jam.
- Pair spice-grilled pork tacos with pineapple or tropical salsas, grilled shrimp with jalapeño cream, or chicken with barbecue sauce and crispy cayenne onions.
- Top black bean burgers with mango-jalapeño salsa.

Go Global

Spicy dishes can offer a feel of the exotic, pulling traditional dishes from many corners of the globe.

- For an iconic sandwich of Venezuela, fold arepa flatbread around slow-cooked pork shoulder, marinated with spices and sweet guava paste.
- Make a Chilean sandwich called churrasco palta, featuring beef tenderloin, tomatoes, avocado, olive oil, and tangy banana wax peppers on a split roll.
- Try Baja-style fish tacos with grilled fish marinated in oil, lime juice and chili powder, paired with Southwestern slaw with jalapeño, cilantro and chipotle pico de gallo.
- Experiment with peri-peri, a spicy South African chile pepper, in a chicken marinade or as a drizzle for hummus.
- Marinate lobster or shrimp in an Indian-inspired sauce of yogurt, garlic, red-pepper flakes and garam masala.

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Barbecue Love

Barbecue sells year-round, selected as a perennial favorite by 64% of chefs surveyed for the National Restaurant Association's 2015 "What's Hot" list. Styles range from American regional to ethnic. Barbecue flavors are trending as an addition to handheld offerings, like sandwiches and pizza, according to Technomic.

- Add a drizzle of smoky barbecue sauce to a nacho plate topped with black beans, sour cream, pico de gallo and pulled chicken, pulled pork or shredded beef.
- Offer Korean barbecue (bulgogi) by grilling thin slices of beef marinated in soy sauce, sugar, sesame oil, garlic and pepper. Serve as tacos in warmed tortillas with a dollop of kimchi and Sriracha sauce, sprinkled with toasted sesame seeds.
- Create a BBQ Breakfast Wrap with pulled barbecued pork, scrambled eggs, jalapeños and salsa.
- For a healthy spin, try a BBQ Chicken Chopped Salad (chopped greens, diced barbecued chicken, with diced tomatoes, corn salsa and corn tortilla strips, or create a BBQ chicken lettuce wrap, with large lettuce leaves replacing the flour tortilla).

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Bowl Them Over

Usually packed with produce, healthful grains and smaller amounts of protein, bowls deliver freshness and wellness cues, and come packed with international flavor profiles. They allow for customization and a way for diners to pick their heat levels.

- Latin bowls often evoke a burrito without the wrap. Layer black beans, rice, salsa, pico de gallo, guacamole and a choice of protein such as grilled fajita beef, chicken or shrimp.
- Create a Thai bowl with Asian slaw, cucumber, brown rice and peanut sauce.
- Pair Indian curry bowls or updated dals (braised and spiced lentils) with fresh slaws and pickled ingredients.
- Take a bowl in a Middle Eastern direction with grilled veggies, couscous and a scoop of hummus or a drizzle of tahini.
- Promote freshness with a “California bowl” of quinoa, beets, roasted squash, dried cranberries, goat cheese, spicy/sweet nuts and balsamic vinaigrette.



Punch Up All-American Favorites

Hot and spicy twists add punch to all-American favorites—chili, burgers, pizza, grilled cheese, fried chicken and wings.

- Make your own spicy mayos and aiolis as spreads for burgers or sandwiches.
- Toss French fries with BBQ/Sriracha sauce and top with fresh jalapeños, pico de gallo and a squeeze of fresh lime juice.
- Jazz up classic or boneless chicken wings with a pepper glaze featuring citrus and roasted serrano peppers.
- Give grilled cheese sandwiches an Indian twist by layering onions sautéed in garam masala and cayenne pepper, roasted chicken, marinara sauce and havarti cheese.
- Try adding ethnic spice blends to appetizers: chicken wings with Middle Eastern za'atar or popcorn with a dash of togarashi (a Japanese seven-spice blend).

That's a Spicy Meatball!

Reimagine the classic comfort foods of meatloaf and meatballs with new hot and spicy flavor profiles. Meatballs can be made with almost any ground meat, seafood, poultry, vegetables, grains or beans.

- Chipotle peppers in adobo sauce add a smoky flavor, as well as heat, to the ground-meat mixture and/or the sauce.
- Spice up meatballs by mixing in Sriracha or Korean gochujang, a fermented red chili paste.
- Make chorizo meatballs with roasted tomatoes, celery heart, onion, saffron and pecorino cheese.
- Try a Korean barbecue meatloaf sandwich with Sriracha mayonnaise and kimchi.
- Jazz up tuna sandwiches by spiking your tuna mixture with dried cranberries and a dash of sambal oelek, a spicy ground-chile sauce that is a staple in Malaysian and Thai cooking.

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Spice Up Your Veggies

Vegetables can provide a palette for spice that gives them a flavor boost and increased interest on your menu. Use cooking methods that enhance the flavor and texture of veggies (such as pan searing, charring, grilling, oven roasting and smoking) and add sprinkles of ground chiles and spice blends for a finishing touch of heat.

- Tame the bitterness of leafy greens such as kale, chicory, escarole and collard greens by grilling, rough chopping and tossing them with a sweet and spicy sauce and using as sides or in veggie tacos.
- Toss collard greens with kimchi and ginger gremolata.
- Create Togarashi-Spiced Vegetable Skewers with seasonal veggies, such as eggplant, zucchini and yellow squash, dusted with the peppery condiment before grilling. Serve with orange sauce for dipping.
- Make Sweet Potato Tempura with ponzu sauce and ground chiles.



Make a Spicy Dip for Your Chips

Capitalize on America's love affair with ethnic sauces and dips, especially those known for their heat, such as salsa. Pair with crunchy pita or tortilla chips.

- Offer a trio of dips, such as edamame hummus, baba ganoush and hot-pepper dip. Serve with feta cheese and marinated artichoke hearts.
- Garnish your house-made hummus with toppings such as warm chickpeas, sun-dried tomato pesto, or diced red and green peppers.
- Blend up a “hummus” using cannellini beans instead of chickpeas for a Tuscan white-bean dip. Top with spicy sun-dried tomato pesto.
- Combine two popular dips by adding avocados to hummus for a “guacamole hummus.”
- Create your own signature salsas and pico de gallos to use as dips or condiments, such as a spicy pineapple pico de gallo of tomatoes, green peppers, onion, jalapeño peppers, cilantro and fresh lime juice.

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