

Q&A Almonds

with
CHEF ROB CORLISS



One Delicious Nut, So Many Ways to Formulate

California almonds are unparalleled in their versatility – with more forms than any other tree nut, almonds may also be the only nuts you can sliver and slice. And while nut butters, meals, milks and flours abound, you'd be hard pressed to find a source that's more versatile, functional or desirable than the California almond.

That's the opinion of Chef Rob Corliss, owner of culinary consultancy All Things Epicurean (Nixa, MO), three-time James Beard House guest chef and 1988 cum laude graduate from Johnson & Wales University. "When it comes to forms and formulations," according to Corliss, "there's a distinct advantage with California almonds."

Why? "You always hear about their versatility," he continues. "They have a big texture—that signature almond crunch—and high visual appeal. And their pleasing, subtle flavor accentuates and supports bold, on-trend flavors without overpowering formulations."

Q Let's start with snacks: How does America's "grazing" habit influence which almond formats you use?

CHEF ROB | Snacking really is the big driver we ideate around as a team. Eating habits are timeless these days and not tied to any schedule. Snacks made with whole almonds can offer that fuel throughout the day.

With whole almonds, we've been bringing unique textures by using different coatings and flavorings. For example, the [Brazilian Cocoa and Coffee Almond](#) that actually have chunks of chopped almonds and other seasonings in the chocolate, espresso and cocoa enrobing—resulting in a whole almond flavored with more almonds.

Q Tell us about other applications where you combine multiple almond forms.

CHEF ROB | Almond clusters are a great concept for that. We're seeing lots of these nut-seed-grain combinations with distinctive flavors and spices. Last year we worked on what we called a [Togarashi-Nori Almond Crunch](#)—named after the Japanese togarashi seasoning.

The beauty in that concept was that it delivered almonds three ways in one plant-forward snack. The crunchy clusters contained whole blanched almonds, blanched slivered almonds and natural sliced almonds. These forms also provide visual appeal within the clusters, from mixing natural and blanched almonds. And because crunch and texture are key building blocks of flavor, we paired those three almond forms with puffed brown rice, sesame seeds, bits of nori seaweed, orange-maple honey, the togarashi spice and flakes of Maldon sea salt that are a little lighter and thicker.

Q Wow. I'll have seconds. How do you know when to use chopped versus sliced almonds? Or natural versus blanched?

CHEF ROB | Good question. With whole almonds, a lot of the time we use the natural skin-on format, which is great. But I've found that lightly roasting a blanched whole almond provides a level of sophistication and elegance to the flavor, and creates a lovely visual element, as well.

While almonds are delicious just as they are, you can change their flavor and texture with roasting. Roasting almonds releases their essential oils and brings out the sophisticated almond notes that deepen the flavor. It also adds a crisper texture and amplifies the crunch, especially in flavored whole almond applications. Make sure you roast the almonds before adding flavor to really amplify the crunch.

Wondering when to use sliced vs. chopped almonds? Think about what you want to achieve in terms of texture: a thin sliced or even slivered almond can deliver a crisp snap. Alternatively, if you want more bite, chopped almonds can provide that mouthfeel. Often, we'll pair a crunchier chopped almond with a crispier sliced or slivered almond for different experiences with each bite.

Q Interesting! Now back to those recipes: tell me what you're doing with almond milk.

CHEF ROB | Interest in almond milk continues to surge. And one of the big advantages of almond milk is that it can offer consumers a lactose-free, dairy-free alternative.

As we focus on providing inspiration, we like to show how almond milk can carry on-trend flavors. And we try to tap into a lot of cross-category beverages, like pairing almond milk with a cold-pressed juice or with coffee, since we're seeing that as a trend, too.

I created an iced [Almond Milk Beet Latte](#), with almond milk, beet powder, cold-brewed coffee and seasonal spices that give the drink more of a savory flavor. Another one of my favorites is the [Creamy Carrot-Almond Lemonade](#) concept that took something quintessential—lemonade—and modernized it with 100-percent carrot juice and almond milk. It has a super-bright orange color and a smooth, light texture that you'd want to enjoy every day.

Q Other than spread it on toast, how are you using almond butter in formulations?

CHEF ROB | Almond butters are probably the most exciting category for me to work with. They're ripe for innovation and flavor-forward creations.

Almond butter can be a standalone snack that you can eat by itself or use as a dip, like the [mango masala almond butter](#) with dried, pureed mango and hints of pink peppercorn and Indian spices. Almond butter can also go in a sweet direction – consider the [five-spice dark chocolate almond butter](#) with unsweetened cocoa, candied ginger and Chinese five-spice.

Almond butter is useful as a clean-label binding ingredient in other formulations, like a trio of snack truffles made with creamy almond butter, almond meal, chopped almonds, puffed quinoa, honey and vanilla extract. I formulated three different flavorful coatings: [hibiscus-orange](#), [coconut curry](#), and [spiced chocolate](#).

Q You make it sound delicious—and easy. Can making the most of almond forms really be this simple?

CHEF ROB | Absolutely. Some of the most beloved snacks now emerging are rooted in something mainstream and comforting that's been updated with a unique twist. Not only do almonds have multiple forms to experiment with, they also deliver on other key attributes, like natural, clean label and with a healthy halo. Today's food is all about the experience, so if you can craft something memorable and experiential, then you've got a shot at hitting a home run.