

# HEAT WAVE

It's getting hot in here! Spicy condiments are taking over America's pantries.

BY JULIANA LABIANCA

If your food friends seem fired up these days, it might be because they're eating an extraordinary amount of hot sauce. Americans consumed more than ever during the past year, and we're headed into peak sauce season now: Sales jump 45 percent during the week of the Super Bowl, according to Instacart. Things likely won't cool down anytime soon. Experts predict the hot sauce market will grow from \$3 billion to \$5 billion in the next six years. TikTokers have fueled the fire by drizzling hot sauce on mashed potatoes, pickles, Flamin' Hot Cheetos and Oreos, and food producers have raced to create hotter and hotter peppers for those who dare. Last summer, Pepper X dethroned the Carolina Reaper as the spiciest variety on earth, paving the way for even more aggressive sauces and pastes. The hot sauce boom isn't just about thrill-seeking, though—spicy condiments at every heat level have been hitting the market. Here's a primer on the trend, and a guide to what's on the shelf.

Hot stuff sells: Almost 72 percent of restaurants call out the word "spicy" on menus, and close to 20 percent have dishes with hot sauce!

SOURCE: DATASSENTIAL



## WHAT'S HOT NOW

These are the most popular kinds of spicy condiments.



### Louisiana Style

Tabasco pioneered this vinegary sauce in 1868; Frank's RedHot (the best-selling hot sauce) and Crystal are similar.

Everyone loves the crunch!



### Chili Crisp

Pepper flakes and bits of fried onion and garlic give this trendy spicy oil from China its crisp texture.



### Mexican Style

This sauce is also called salsa picante and typically features Mexican red peppers such as arbol, jalapeño and pequin.



### Sriracha

This Thai sauce is known for its tangy flavor, slight sweetness and ketchup-like consistency; it's thicker than other hot sauces.



### Gochujang

This paste-like condiment originated in Korea and gets its earthy, spicy flavor from red chiles, sticky rice and fermented soybeans.



### Sambal Oelek

A sambal is a spicy Indonesian paste; oelek is the classic kind made with ground red chiles, salt and vinegar.



### Harissa

The name comes from the word *harasa*, which means "to mash" in Arabic. Some versions include warm spices like cumin and coriander.



### Caribbean Hot Sauce

It's typically made with Scotch bonnet peppers, one of the hottest varieties, along with fruits like mango, papaya and pineapple.

SRIRACHA LETTERING: RYAN LIEBE; FOOD STYLING: CHRISTINE ALIBANO; SRIRACHA BOTTLE: JEFFREY WESTBROOK; GOCHUJANG SAUCE AND TABASCO: PHILIP FRIEDMAN.

# SWEAT TEST

Take this quiz to see if you're hot stuff.



**1. True or false:**

Hot sauce was used in Aztec times as a punishment.



**2. A chile pepper's heat is measured on which scale?**

- A. Rankine
- B. Kelvin
- C. Scoville



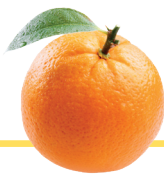
**3. Which singer sang "I got hot sauce in my bag"?**

- A. Lady Gaga
- B. Beyoncé
- C. Jason Derulo



**4. True or false:**

A chile pepper has more vitamin C than an orange.



**5. The world record for downing a bottle of hot sauce is...**

- A. 3 minutes
- B. 95 seconds
- C. 8.6 seconds

**6. True or false:**

Hot sauce can cause ulcers.



**7. Is a chile pepper a fruit or vegetable?**

- A. Fruit
- B. Vegetable

**8. Which country produces the most chile peppers?**

- A. Mexico
- B. Brazil
- C. China

**9. Which band's logo is this?**



- A. Red Hot Chili Peppers
- B. 98 Degrees
- C. Spice Girls

**10. What is the best antidote for too much heat?**

- A. Ice water
- B. Milk
- C. Ginger ale



ANSWERS: 1.T, 2.C, 3.B, 4.T, 5.C, 6.F, 7.A, 8.C, 9.A, 10.B



## Behind the Burn

Here's what happens to your body when you eat something really spicy.

**1 Your brain's fire alarm goes off.** Mouths have pain receptors that are activated by capsaicin, a compound in chile peppers, says David Julius, PhD, a physiologist who won a Nobel Prize for research on heat sensation and pain. Those receptors signal your brain that you've ingested something hot.

**2 Your body thinks it's on fire.** Your brain has alerted all systems of the heat situation. Your skin might flush, your eyes may get watery and your nose could run in an attempt to expel the capsaicin.

**3 You start to cool down.** "This happens mostly through sweating, which sheds heat," says Julius. As the perspiration evaporates, it cools your skin.



People who are into spicy food are most likely to describe themselves as creative, confident and adventurous.

SOURCE: ONEPOLL

## UP FOR THE Challenge?

Eating hot sauce has become an extreme sport.



**GREAT BALLS OF FIRE**  
Salvador Molly's, Portland, OR

Participants in the restaurant's annual February fundraiser gobble rounds of habanero cheese fritters. The last person standing is crowned the King or Queen of Heat—with an actual crown.

**BAYOU BEAST**

Bayou Hot Wings, New Orleans

If you down 10 wings smothered in super-hot sauce (it has scorpion peppers!) within 5 minutes, you'll earn a T-shirt...and bragging rights.



**4 HORSEMEN BURGER**  
Chunky's Burgers & More, San Antonio

Eat a burger topped with jalapeño, serrano and ghost peppers, plus habanero hot sauce, within 25 minutes to land your photo on the Wall of Flame.



**DOUGHNUTS OF DEATH**

TN Hot Sauce Expo, Nashville

The most popular event at this November expo involves doughnuts filled with Carolina Reaper pepper jelly. The first contestant to finish three takes the prize.

**SPICY PIZZA OF DOOM**

NYC Hot Sauce Expo, Brooklyn

This challenge at the fall expo features a pizza loaded with Carolina Reapers and hot sauce. Whoever eats the most slices in 10 minutes wins!

## HOW THE STARS USE HOT SAUCE



"It's all about the perfect balance of tang and heat! I make a Texas mule with tequila, ginger beer, ginger-infused simple syrup and a splash of Texas Pete."

—Kardea Brown

"I sometimes put hot sauce in peanut butter and jelly sandos or add it to pancake batter—it's great with maple syrup and butter."

—Michael Symon



"I love hot sauce with fruit. A little dab on mango sorbet is awesome!"

—Jet Tila

"Whenever I make mac and cheese, I put a few shakes of hot sauce in there to give it zestiness."

—Anne Burrell



"Heat brings out fruity and floral notes. I love to put it on an ice-cold salted pear or apple."

—Alex Guarnaschelli

"Hot sauce should complement, not overwhelm. I put it on eggs, fatty pork products and roasted vegetables—and a little touch in my chocolate sauce!"

—Geoffrey Zakarian



ORANGE RED PEPPER, BEYONCÉ, LADY GAGA, JASON DERULO, ICE WATER, MILK AND GINGER ALE: GETTY IMAGES.

# HOT BITES

Our test kitchen chefs kicked up the heat. Try one of these fiery dishes!



## JALAPEÑO TURKEY BURGERS

Mix 1½ pounds ground turkey, ¼ cup jalapeño hot sauce, 2 each sliced scallions and grated garlic cloves, 2 teaspoons dijon mustard and 1 teaspoon kosher salt; form into 8 thin patties. Cook in 2 batches in vegetable oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, 1½ minutes per side; top with sliced monterey jack during the last 30 seconds. For each burger, stack 2 patties on a toasted bun with lettuce and avocado. Top with a mix of ¼ cup each mayonnaise and sour cream and 2 tablespoons jalapeño hot sauce, plus pickled jalapeño slices.



**“Jalapeño hot sauce does double duty in this recipe: It gives the ground turkey a flavorful kick and the sauce some extra zing.”**

—Steve Jackson

## GOCHUJANG SHRIMP COCKTAIL

Stir together ½ cup ketchup, 2 tablespoons gochujang, 1 tablespoon mayonnaise, 2 teaspoons rice vinegar and 1 teaspoon each soy sauce, sesame oil and sugar in a bowl. Mix 1½ teaspoons each wasabi powder and water to form a paste, then stir into the ketchup mixture and refrigerate. Top the cocktail sauce with toasted sesame seeds and sliced scallions; serve with cooked shrimp.



**“This spicy, sweet, tangy cocktail sauce is reminiscent of a gochujang-based Korean dipping sauce that’s commonly paired with seafood.”**

—Young Sun Huh

**“This dish is inspired by my teenage daughter—she loves mango wedges dipped in Valentina hot sauce.”**

—Khalil Hymore

## SPICY TROPICAL FRUIT SALAD

Peel 2 mangoes and 1 pineapple, then cut into chunks. Toss with 3 tablespoons Mexican-style hot sauce (such as Valentina), 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice, 1 tablespoon sugar and ½ cup finely chopped fresh cilantro. Garnish with more cilantro and serve with more hot sauce.

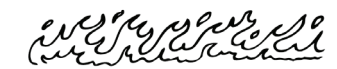


PHOTOS: RYAN LIEBE; FOOD STYLING: CHRISTINE ALBANO; PROP STYLING: SARAH SMART.



## HARISSA-TAHINI COOKIES

Beat 1 stick softened butter and ½ cup each granulated and brown sugar with a mixer on medium-high speed until fluffy. Add ½ cup tahini and beat 1 minute, then beat in 1 egg, 1 tablespoon harissa and 1 teaspoon vanilla. Whisk together 1¾ cups flour, 1 teaspoon baking soda and ½ teaspoon salt, then beat into the butter mixture; chill 30 minutes. Roll the dough into 1½-inch balls; dip the tops in harissa, then roll in a mix of ½ cup granulated sugar and 1 teaspoon ras el hanout. Arrange harissa-side up on parchment-lined baking sheets. Bake at 350° until the edges are set, 15 to 17 minutes. Whisk 1 cup confectioners’ sugar, 1 tablespoon water and 2 teaspoons each harissa and honey; dip the cookies in the glaze and let set.



**“My daughter loves to bake classic recipes with a twist, so I developed these with her in mind. The warm heat of harissa pairs well with the tahini.”**

—Amy Stevenson

## CALABRIAN CHILI CAVATAPPI

Toast ½ cup panko in 1 tablespoon olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat; season with salt and pepper, then transfer to a bowl and mix with 1 tablespoon each grated lemon zest and chopped parsley. Add 2 more tablespoons olive oil to the same skillet. Add 8 sliced garlic cloves and cook until sizzling, then add 1 pint cherry tomatoes and cook, stirring, until they begin to break down, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in 4 tablespoons each butter and Calabrian chili paste. Add 12 ounces cooked cavatappi, plus ¾ cup pasta-cooking water. Cook over medium heat, stirring and adding more pasta water as needed, until combined, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from the heat; stir in ¾ cup grated parmesan and 2 teaspoons lemon juice and season with salt and pepper. Top with the panko mixture.



**“Calabrian chili paste is the star of this velvety butter sauce—it has a bright fiery heat that complements the sweet cherry tomatoes.”**

—Kim Klatzkin

