

THE NEXT FRONTIER IN SNACKING: UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF ALMOND BUTTER

BY RACHEL ZEMSER, CFS, CCS, MS AT A LA CARTE CONNECTIONS



In today's fast-paced food landscape, snacking is no longer just an occasional indulgence—it's an essential part of daily eating habits. From bite-sized protein bars to portable squeeze packs, consumers are embracing snacks that fit seamlessly into their busy lifestyles. But as demand for functional, flavorful, and clean-label options grows, product developers are looking for innovative ways to elevate traditional snack ingredients. **Enter almond butter: a versatile, nutrient-dense, and flavor-adaptable ingredient poised to transform the snack category.**

According to Innova Market Insights, snacks rank among the top five categories for new product launches featuring almonds. Almond butter presents significant potential for innovation in this space, offering a diverse range of flavors, colors, and textures. With its versatility, there is an almond butter variety to suit every preference, making it a valuable ingredient for snack developers.

ALMOND BUTTER'S DIVERSE ROAST, COLOR AND TEXTURE OPTIONS

Almond butter is far more than a simple spread—it's a dynamic ingredient with a spectrum of textures and roast profiles that influence its taste, mouthfeel, and functional properties.

- **Roast Varieties:** Almond butter comes in a range of roast levels, from lightly steamed for microbial safety (often marketed as "raw") to extra-dark roasted. Lighter roasts preserve a mild and creamy flavor, while darker roasts intensify the nutty depth, making them ideal for applications where a more pronounced taste is desired.
- **Color Considerations:** The color of almond butter also depends on whether the almonds have been blanched before processing. This distinction is especially important in snack applications where developers may want to incorporate their own colors or vibrant inclusions that need to stand out. Unblanched almond butter has a darker hue, which can reduce contrast, while blanched almond butter offers a lighter, more neutral base. On packaging, blanched almond butter is always labeled as such, whereas unblanched is typically the default and may not be explicitly stated.
- **Texture Considerations:** Texture can be a key factor driving snack innovation. Almond butter's consistency can be fine-tuned to suit different applications. A thicker, more viscous almond paste is excellent for forming snack bites and filled confections, whereas a finer more fluid version is optimal

for enrobing or drizzling over snack bars. Almond butter manufacturers can tailor the texture of their products by adjusting grinding time. Since there is no FDA standard of identity for almond butter's final texture, each manufacturer employs its own grinding method, resulting in a unique signature consistency. To ensure consistency in product development, it is advisable for formulators to work closely with a specific supplier and maintain the same source throughout production. Extended grinding releases more natural oils, creating a smoother, creamier almond butter. A crunchy almond butter is made by blending small almond pieces into a smooth almond butter creating a textured contrast that enhances the eating experience. This variety adds a satisfying crunch that works well in snack applications such as a nut butter-filled pretzel, a sandwich cookie or a mix in for granola clusters.

FLAVOR PAIRINGS AND CUSTOMIZATION

One of almond butter's greatest strengths is its ability to seamlessly integrate with a variety of flavors. Its naturally mild profile allows it to act as a base for both classic and innovative flavor combinations:

- **Sweet pairings:** Chocolate, vanilla, honey, cinnamon, and fruit purees (strawberry, banana, or raspberry) can enhance almond butter's nutty undertones.
- **Savory applications:** Combining almond butter with umami-rich ingredients like miso or spices such as smoked paprika can create unexpected yet delightful snack flavors.
- **Trend-driven flavors:** From matcha-infused almond butter to "birthday cake" variations with natural sprinkles, there's room for endless creativity.



ENROBING, FILLING, AND FORMING: PROCESSING CONSIDERATIONS

For food manufacturers looking to integrate almond butter into snack formulations, understanding the physical properties of nut butter is key to optimizing texture and stability. Here's what product developers need to know:

1. Enrobing with Almond Butter

Almond butter's high-fat content makes it an excellent enrobing ingredient, particularly when combined with confectionery coatings. A standard formulation might include a 40:60 ratio of almond butter to cocoa butter or palm fat-coatings, allowing the mixture to solidify at room temperature while maintaining a creamy texture upon biting.

2. Filling in Snacks and Confections

Almond butter can be used as a filling in snack bars, chocolates, or cookies, but its viscosity must be adjusted to maintain structure without excessive oil migration. This can be achieved by:

- Adding a small amount of starch or fiber to stabilize the consistency.
- Combining it with sugar syrups or natural thickeners to achieve a smooth, yet stable, flow.
- Emulsifying with lecithin or plant-based stabilizers to improve texture without compromising mouthfeel.

3. Forming Almond Butter-Based Snacks

The pliability of almond butter makes it ideal for forming snack-sized portions, such as:

- **Energy balls or bars:** Thickened with oats, seeds, or protein powders, these can be rolled into bite-sized portions or pressed into bars.
- **Layered snacks:** A base layer of almond butter combined with crispy inclusions (like puffed quinoa or crushed nuts) can be layered with chocolate or yogurt coatings for textural contrast.
- **Squeeze packs:** Convenient for on-the-go snacking, almond butter squeeze packs can be flavored with cocoa, vanilla, or even savory spices for an easy, nutritious snack option.



THE FUTURE OF ALMOND BUTTER SNACKS

With consumers seeking nutritious, flavorful, and texture-rich snack options, almond butter presents an exciting opportunity for innovation. Whether used as an enrobing layer, a creamy filling, or the star ingredient in high-protein snack bars, its versatility makes it an invaluable tool for product developers. By leveraging different roast levels, pairing it with complementary flavors, and optimizing its physical properties for processing, the possibilities for almond butter in the snack category are limitless.

For food scientists and R&D teams, the challenge lies in balancing functionality with indulgence—creating snacks that are not only delicious but also meet the growing demand for clean-label, plant-based, and nutrient-dense options.

The next generation of almond butter snacks is on the horizon, and for those willing to experiment, the sky's the limit.