



MARKON®

# TRENDS

SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER

**ASIAN QSRs**  
**BEVERAGE ERA**  
**SIMPLICITY**  
**CABBAGE CORE**



SPRING 2026

# AT A GLANCE



## YEN FOR FLAVOR

Asian-cuisine QSRs are delivering the bold, craveable flavors today's diners want.



## EXPRESS YOURSELF

Gen Z uses drinks to communicate their style, values, and personality.



## REFINED RESTRAINT

Although global fusion remains extremely relevant, getting back to basics is a counter movement gaining steam.



## THE NEW "IT" VEGETABLE

It's popularity is driven by cost pressures, fiber-forward eating, and a chef-led rediscovery of just how versatile, textural, and budget-friendly cabbage really is!



**QUICK NEW FLAVOR  
EXPERIENCES**

# QSR GLOBAL SHIFT

## FAST FLAVOR REVOLUTION

Dominated by the rapid expansion of bowl culture, specialty tea shops, and Korean fried chicken, this trend is booming, with sales projected to hit over \$50B by 2031. It's largely driven by demand for the authentic, customizable, and affordable meals that Gen Z love, as well as the shift towards healthier, plant-forward options.



- **Curry Up Now:** With its focus on Indian streetfood, this spot leans heavy on vegetable-forward dishes with just the right amount of spice—in rice bowls, tikka burritos, and potato samosas.
- **Din Tai Fung:** While more upscale, this modern Chinese dumpling restaurant is creating QSR copycats focusing on dumplings as comfort food.
- **Marugame Udon:** Rapidly expanding in major metro areas, it's known for customizable udon noodle soups and a tempura bar.
- **Jollibee:** This global phenomenon now has its sights set on North America. It has a family-friendly menu that's created a cult following with dishes like hand-breaded fried chicken, Filipino sweet-style tomato spaghetti, and crispy peach-mango hand pies.

**BOLD FLAVOR,  
GLOBAL COMFORT**

#### ENERGY

STRAWBERRY-CAYENNE  
SPRITZ

PINEAPPLE-CITRUS  
YERBA MATE

HONEYDEW GREEN TEA  
COOLER

#### MOOD

REISHI MUSHROOM  
MOCHAS

BLUEBERRY-  
LAVENDER  
LEMONADE

APPLE-SPINACH  
FOCUS JUICE

#### GUT HEALTH

KOMBUCHA WITH  
FRUIT FOAM

GOLDEN TURMERIC  
MILK

FRESH GINGER  
SHOTS

#### DESERT-ADJACENT

FROZEN LEMONADE

DIRTY SODAS

MATCHA AFFOGATOS

#### SHARE-WORTHY

FRUIT OMBRE  
REFRESHERS

UBE LATTES

ICED BUTTERFLY PEA  
TEA

#### NON-ALC

FRUIT MOCKTAILS

PRESSED JUICES

WATERMELON SLUSHIE  
WITH TAJIN RIM

Gen Z is reshaping the beverage industry by demanding drinks that are functional, customizable, visually striking, and aligned with wellness and identity.

# VIRAL SIP CULTURE

# FUSION PUSHBACK

## BACKLASH TO FLAVORMAXXING

Yes global flavors remain an industry force, but a parallel cultural pivot is emerging. For some customers, simplicity feels like a palate reset.



- Sensory fatigue is real. Reducing the number of flavors per dish while boosting intensity through technique, gives focus to the plate.
- "Real ingredients" are the flex. Think whole fruits and vegetables prepared in ways that highlight their natural flavors for true authenticity.
- Consumers want value; operators want lower food costs. Minimalist drinks and dishes feel more premium while often lowering budgets.
- Never boring, these dishes are intentional and exude quiet confidence. Never overly extra.

**KEEP IT  
SIMPLE**

# FLAVOR CANVAS

BUDGET FRIENDLY, HIGH  
IMPACT

Not a side, not a garnish, but the hero of the plate. Chefs love cabbage because it's low-cost, high-margin, fiber-rich, and has a long shelf-life, making it ideal during a year of price pressure and supply volatility. It's praised for being versatile, long-lasting, and globally familiar.



## ASIAN

KOREAN KIMCHI  
GOCHUJANG  
CABBAGE CUTLET  
JAPANESE  
OKONOMIYAKI

## COMFORT

MODERN STUFFED  
CABBAGE  
CABBAGE "PATTY  
MELT"  
CABBAGE  
BOURGUIGNON

## SALADS

CABBAGE CAESAR  
SALAD  
CABBAGE/AVO  
GREEN GODDESS  
BOWL  
CABBAGE  
CARPACCIO

# THE HOT LIST



- Deeper comfort food
- Swicy, swangy, swavory
- Cactus water
- Powerhouse proteins
- Charred brassicas
- Black lime
- Biome-boosting fare
- Fibermaxxing
- Mini cocktails
- Newstalgia
- Layered heat
- Dates
- Smaller portions
- Chicago tavern-style pizza
- Black currant flavors
- Time as an ingredient
- Local customers
- Calabrian chiles
- AI personalized diets
- Veg of the year: broccolini

- Tteokbokki
- Chef tech
- Imperfect produce
- Exceptional hospitality
- Smoked fruits
- Mindful snacks
- Kelp
- Retro dips
- Caviar bumps
- Experiential dining
- Kimchi 2.0
- Bitterness
- Tinned seafood
- Ginger-tumeric blends
- Goopy, gummy, slurpable
- Salsa negra
- Smoked tea vegetables
- Salted maple desserts
- Mushrooms as mains
- Luxury buffets



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## FRESH CROP

A weekly rundown of the fresh produce market including prices, supply levels, and quality.

## TRENDS

Forecasts what is on the culinary horizon four times per year.

## SOURCES

Baum + White  
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