



TRENDS

FALL 2026 NEWSLETTER

**GLP-1 MICRO-DINING
TEXTURE CRAVINGS
THE GREAT SANDWICH
COMEBACK
AUTUMN'S DARK GEMS**



FALL 2026

AT A GLANCE



GLP-1 MEDS: TRANSFORMING MENUS

The proliferation of GLP-1 medications has changed how many consumers eat.



THE PERFECT BITE

Social media has transformed food into a visual and sensory experience. Diners want to hear and feel the food as much as taste it!



HANDHELDS DRIVE TRAFFIC

Sandwiches sit at the intersection of comfort, value, customization, and global flavor exploration, four of the strongest trends in 2026.



AUTUMN'S DARK GEMS

Industry forecasts point to a shift away from bright summer citrus toward deeper, jewel-toned fruits such as blackberries, lingonberries, pomegranates, figs, cranberries, and black currants.



**ALL ABOUT
MOUTHFEEL**

HEALTHY DIET REVOLUTION

SMALL BUT MIGHTY

In what might be one of the most important menu shifts of the decade, small portions are becoming more common. Even beyond fine dining, customers are seeking quality over quantity, challenging restaurants to respond to changing eating habits.



- **Shareable produce plates:** Keep the flavor bold and fun. Serve charred vegetable flights with French-peeled carrots, broccolini, and cauliflower, each with its own global sauce. Or how about a pickle board that combines olives, red onions, radishes, Romanesco...even green strawberries!
- **Half portions:** Reduce the number of ounces in steak, chicken, and seafood, and pair with leafy green sides like broccolini or Brussels sprouts with roasted winter squash.
- **Premium snacks:** Prioritize lean protein, fiber-rich produce, and healthy fats, in dishes like hummus plates with raw vegetables and roasted chickpeas, roasted baby carrots with a labneh schmear and dukkah seasoning, or deviled eggs with pickled beet and cucumber topping.

**NUTRIENT DENSE +
BOLD FLAVOR**



CHEWY

Miso-Roasted Shiitake
Mushrooms
Blue-Cheese Stuffed
Dates
Tteokbokki with Charred
Green Onions

CREAMY

Whipped Feta
with Roasted
Strawberries
Ricotta Toasts
with Figs
Soft Serve Ice
Cream with
Raspberry Coulis

CRUNCHY

Banh Mi with Pickled
Carrots & Jalapeños
Mexican Jicama Slaw
Nashville Hot Chicken
with Shredded Cabbage

CRISPY

Brussels Sprouts &
Kale Chips
Potato Pavé
Chili Crisp Fries

COMBOS

Crunchy + Creamy
Crackly + Velvety
Chewy + Juicy

FROZEN

Pear-Ginger Granita
Nitro-Frozen Grapes
Pomegranate Citrus
Pearls on Oysters

Diners want food that crunches, shatters, stretches, crackles, drips, or contrasts soft and crisp elements. Social media has amplified the appeal of foods that create sensory moments, while operators are using texture to make even familiar dishes feel new.

TEXTURE = EXCITEMENT

PREMIUM HANDHELDS

STACKED WITH FLAVOR

Operators are investing in better breads, global sauces, and chef-driven fillings rather than treating sandwiches as simple lunch items.



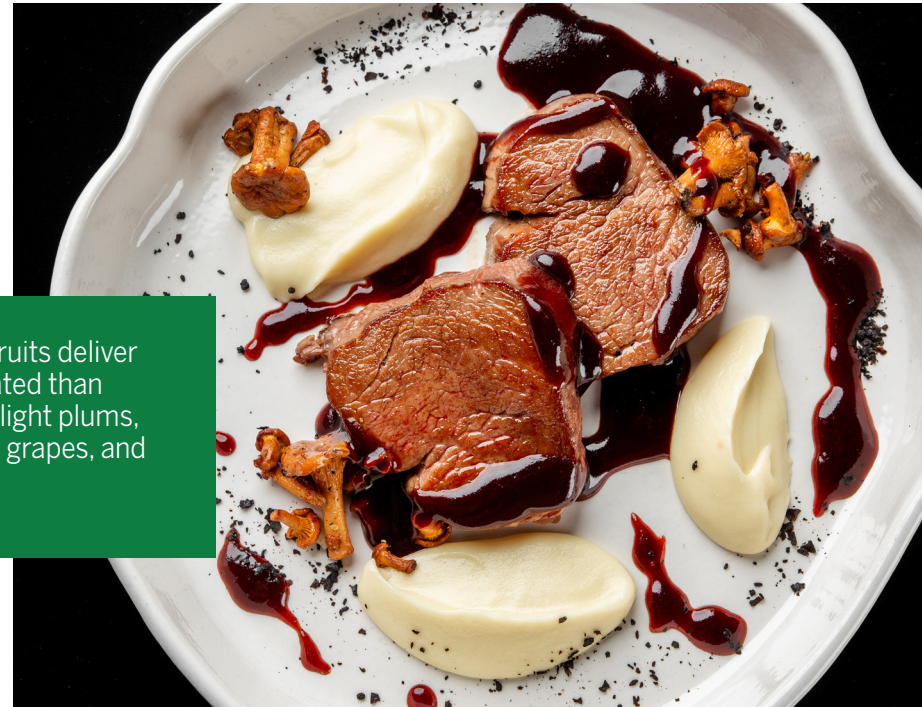
- **Bigger flavors:** instead of serving turkey or ham sandwiches, operators are creating hot honey chicken, shawarma, loaded po' boys, elevated grilled cheeses, Cuban melts, and banh mi-inspired subs.
- **Produce-driven toppings:** many of the most talked-about sandwiches aren't centered solely on meat. They're using slaws, pickled vegetables, unique lettuce blends, heirloom tomatoes, cucumbers, avocados, and fresh herbs.
- **Better bread:** the carriers are more likely to showcase seed toppings, fried herbs, crispy grains, toasted nuts, and pickled vegetables.
- **Global sauces:** the complex flavors of gochujang, tahini, chipotle-honey, salsa macha, and toum are replacing basic mayo and mustard.
- **Value perception:** a loaded sandwich feels like a complete meal that gives a premium experience.

**BUILT
TO CRAVE**

MOODY FRUIT MAGIC

CREATE DRAMATIC VISUAL CONTRAST

Fall fruit is getting darker, bolder, and more sophisticated. Dark fruits deliver richness, sweetness, acidity, and complexity that feel more elevated than traditional pumpkin-spice flavors. Trend reports specifically highlight plums, persimmons, blackberries, pomegranate seeds, cranberries, red grapes, and figs as key autumn flavor drivers.



BEVERAGES

Red currant lemonade
Blackberry mezcal
margarita
Lingonberry aperitif
spritz

SAVORY MAINS

Duck tacos with
cranberry-chipotle
salsa
Ahi poke bowl with
plum ponzu
Grilled radicchio
with fig and black
garlic dressing

SANDWICHES

Blackberry BBQ
brisket
Prosciutto, figs,
arugula, & blue
cheese
Lamb burger with
pomegranate aioli

THE HOT LIST



- Buldak sauce
- Fiber + protein
- Asian QSRs
- Simplicity
- Vegetable pancakes
- Pistachios
- Chili crisp
- Savory porridges
- Alliums
- Practical sustainability
- Urfa Biber Turkish chiles
- Pomegranate seeds
- Interactive dishes
- Protein
- Lingonberries
- Nonna-inspired foods
- Global slaws
- Unique citrus
- Chickpeas & lentils
- Bitter greens

- Fresh herb comeback
- Value over luxury
- Levantine street food
- Mature mocktails
- Black ingredients
- Root vegetables
- Frozen yogurt resurgence
- Harvest bowls
- Flexible grazing
- Jimmy Nardello peppers
- Sweet potatoes
- Peruvian flavors
- Acidity
- Seasonal LTOs
- Fava beans
- Kawakawa
- Gut health
- Meat-like mushrooms
- Cabbage
- Scratch cooking



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FRESH CROP

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

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

SOURCES

Datassential
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Flavor & The Menu
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Nation's Restaurant News
ProChef Smartbrief

Produce Bluebook
QSR Magazine
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