

A Return to Holiday Bakery Traditions

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, local legislation and guidelines around social distancing and other safety precautions mean the winter holidays will feel a little different this year.



Designer Desserts, Indiana

After nearly a year of uncertainty, many people are eager to experience some of the familiar, uplifting aspects of the season, including the classic cakes, cookies and other baked goods that have been part of their holiday celebrations for years.

Manderfield's Home Bakery, which has three Wisconsin locations, offers butter cookies, German stollen and other popular holiday items. This year, the bakery has taken the necessary safety precautions amid COVID, but it's still going to decorate its space with the usual giant snowflakes, play Christmas music and include other ambiance elements that help attract customers, according to Doug Manderfield, who's in charge of public relations and marketing for the bakery.

"People will still want their comfort foods," Manderfield says. "We follow all the safety precautions that have been suggested by the CDC; that's behind the scenes. I want the bakery to feel like a place that's as normal and happy as possible throughout the holidays."

Ambiance is just one element that can enhance the holiday experience. Whether bakeries sell specialties like Christmas cookie cups, Rosca de Reyes, gingerbread donuts or other holiday desserts, they can evoke fond memories for customers—and see the peak sales they typically expect this time of year—in the following ways.

Highlight Baked Goods' Origins

Emphasizing that baked goods are prepared with a personal touch and a little history may strike a chord with customers seeking traditional items.

In recent years, Manderfield desserts that are made with family recipes, such as the fruitcake, Grandma's pumpkin torte and angel food cake, have drawn interest from many consumers, including millennials, according to Manderfield.

"The younger generations are getting to be more intrigued about the past," he says. "And when they come into the store and see [we sell] something old-fashioned, it resonates well with them."

Add a Twist to Seasonal Limited-Time Offerings

Marketing seasonal items as limited-time offerings can help build interest in and demand for them.

Palmer's Sweetery and Café in Maplewood, New Jersey, began offering sufganiyot—round jelly donuts customarily enjoyed during Hanukkah—in 2017, according to co-owner and pastry chef Kia Palmer, who says not being able to get the items year-round makes them more special.

The bakery packs its yeast donuts with raspberry jelly, a traditional sufganiyot center, as well as more unique fillings, including cranberry-orange compote and apple butter.

"We're not a traditional Jewish or kosher bakery; we had donuts on our menu, so we thought: Why not do something that's a traditional dessert for the holiday and would allow us to be inclusive?," Palmer says. "Although we do donuts every Sunday, they're not always specially stuffed; there's some novelty to it, which makes people excited."



Manderfield's, Wisconsin

Offer Single-Serving Bakery Items

Bakeries are seeing greater demand for individual servings and prepackaged items. Consumers may want to pick up a few small single-serve items for their family. Or, they may be looking for group desserts that are easier to share safely than full cakes or pies.

Manderfield's is looking into individually bagging its classic angel, Santa and other iced cutout cookies, which are typically the business's biggest winter holiday sellers. The bakery may also expand its portable one-serving offerings.

"People really like cute novelty things like cake pops—and there are a lot of different things you can do with [them]," Manderfield says. "We've made little Rice Krispies [treats] on sticks in different Christmas shapes dipped in chocolate. They're individually packaged."

Honor Home Baking Traditions

Preparing holiday meals and treats as a family is an annual tradition in many households. Just as making sourdough, banana bread and other baked goods was an explosive trend this past spring when many people were sheltering in place, we may see another wave of home baking around the holidays as people look for meaningful activities to enjoy at home.

This season, Palmer is considering expanding her bakery's selection of "we make, you bake" items, which include unbaked scones, biscuits and pie dough that customers can bring home to prepare.

"We're giving them the opportunity to let us do the heavy lifting—the mixing, rolling and cutting," she says. "It allows you to put the finishing touches on so it's warm on the table for your family."

Help Augment At-Home Celebrations

During the holidays, Indiana-based Designer Desserts serves a number of seasonally inspired cupcakes, including its white chocolate peppermint Sleigh Ride, an eggnog variety and a New Year's Eve-themed Bubbly Champagne cupcake made with champagne-infused batter and frosting.

Although holiday parties and gatherings won't happen at the same scale as they have in years past, Designer Desserts still plans to make and promote many of the themed offerings it has previously sold for these events, according to General Manager Vanessa Ryan. Customers seem to still be having celebrations, she says; they're just smaller.

In fact, certain holiday traditions that were previously celebrated outside the home are being moved into backyards and living rooms, which could present a new opportunity for bakeries as people look to buy more celebratory desserts for these events. "For New Year's Eve, a lot of people [used to] go out to restaurants or other venues," Ryan says. "I think there will be more at-home parties so people will probably buy a little more [than usual for their families]."

Though the pandemic has placed a major strain on bakeries, this holiday season presents a significant sales opportunity for those that can help consumers find comfort, celebrate traditions and make the season extra special with delicious desserts.

From sophisticated cranberry Bundt cake to show-stopping New Year's Eve cupcakes, discover Dawn's wide range of recipes to inspire your bakery menu this holiday season.

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—Vanessa Ryan, General Manager, Designer Desserts, Valparaiso & Schererville, IN



Designer Desserts, Indiana

Palmer's Sweetsery and Cafe, New Jersey

5 STEPS TO ...

CREATING A HOLIDAY MENU THAT WILL DRIVE BUSINESS IN 2021

Holiday planning is about more than what you sell in the final months of the year. How you shape your menu and your marketing sets the tone for the New Year and beyond. Be sure you're crafting a menu that brings people into your bakery and makes them eager for all you'll offer in 2021.



Sprinkle in the Spices

1 The holidays are the perfect time of year to play with spices.

From traditional favorites like cinnamon and nutmeg to unexpected inclusions like cardamom and chili, the winter months are ideal for the warming quality spices bring to nearly any baked good. And, they're versatile enough to work in everything from cookies and muffins to donuts, cupcakes, and more.

Celebrate Citrus

2 People often think of citrus as a summer flavor, but in reality, citrus

tastes best and is in peak season in winter. Bright lemon and lime, or blood orange and mandarin are the perfect compliments to the deep chocolates and nut flavors often associated with the holidays. And candied zest makes the perfect handmade finish to elevated desserts.

Go Gourmet

3 Everyone loves donuts, but not many may think of them as a gourmet

dessert. With the latest Gourmet Donut trend, your customers will want donuts for their holiday parties and all yearlong. Gourmet Donuts bring together trend and tradition by taking favorite desserts and translating them into a donut. Who wouldn't want a Cream Cheese Truffle Donut or Black Forest Cherry Bismark? It's definitely not your typical everyday donut!

Sell All Sizes

4 Most bakeries made adaptations to their packaging and serving

sizes to respond to COVID protocols. Keep those coming this holiday season. From single serving sized treats to smaller cakes baked for parties with fewer attendees, be sure to offer customers an assortment that can meet everyone's needs this season.

Do Digital

5 To help consumers feel as safe as possible as they support

your business, be sure to update your website with your holiday menu. This will ensure online shopping and ordering, driving more sales and giving customers one more option for getting what they need this season.