

Exotic foods becoming commonplace

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Food trend experts predict exotic and extreme foods such as yogurt with rose petals and orange blossoms will become more common on consumer's plates.

The prediction came in Chicago during the annual meeting and exposition of the Institute of Food Technologists.

Lu Ann Williams, senior analyst with Innova Market Insights based in the Netherlands, cited the explosion of bottled water that's packaged, priced and marketed to vastly different consumer categories.

"You can find it from simple to premium -- 12 cents a bottle to \$38 bling," said Williams, noting several international trends have swept into the United States. Japanese staples such as sushi and sashimi are everywhere, she said, and Japanese-influenced products -- including lox wrapped with seaweed -- are becoming common.

In food service, restaurants with upscale atmosphere and low-end prices reflect consumers evolving preferences with a restaurant category called "polished-casual," said Joe Pawlak, vice president of the Chicago food research company Technomic.

"Consumers are just more interested in food these days, whether going out to eat or cooking at home," said Pawlak. "They're still building 1,000-square-foot kitchens with Viking stoves even if they're not using them every day."

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