

ONCE consumed solely as a snack, pistachios – part of the Anacardiaceae family – have surged in popularity, emerging as the new star of the local culinary scene.

No longer limited to cake and ice cream toppings, they have become a key flavour in beverages like smoothies and coffee, sparking a trend that has won over taste buds nationwide.

“Unlike peanuts or almonds, pistachios – often dubbed ‘smart nuts’ – offer a more complex flavour profile that is slightly sweet, subtly creamy, and delicately nutty,” said Dr Mohd Hairi Jalis, senior lecturer in culinary arts at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM).

This blend of flavour and texture places this Middle Eastern nut in the premium category, and can be made into many forms, from paste to dessert creams.

“Pistachios naturally offer a complex yet balanced taste, making them technically versatile in culinary applications. They can be transformed into a paste, roughly chopped for added texture, or blended into a smooth cream,” said Mohd Hairi.

He added that pistachios also serve a technical role in some recipes. Their natural fat content gives them a smooth and creamy texture, making them ideal for desserts like mousse, ganache, or gelato. Additionally, they can unify different flavours in a single dessert composition.

According to him, pistachios’ popularity is also driven by visual appeal and global culinary storytelling – particularly in today’s social media era, where food aesthetics matter. The nut’s soft green hue provides a striking contrast that feels exclusive and elevated.

Furthermore, pistachios are often linked with certain gastronomic cultures like the Middle East and Europe, enhancing their perception as a premium ingredient and adding a sophisticated appeal.

From a sociocultural standpoint, he said pistachios are considered exotic or rare in the South-East Asian context, which adds to their luxurious and special feel – even in a simple form like a coffee.

The use of pistachios in local pastries, especially in urban bakeries and fusion restaurants, is

Nuts about pistachio

What makes this nut so popular in Malaysia?

likely to endure as it aligns with modern consumer tastes for healthy, natural, and exclusive ingredients.

However, their continued popularity will depend on how well they can be adapted in local recipes to suit local tastes.

Mohd Hairi suggested creatively incorporating pistachios into traditional recipes – such as seri muka with pistachio cream, kuih bangkit made with pistachio powder, or dodol and wajik mixed with ground pistachios, coconut milk, and palm sugar – while maintaining the original taste.



(Left) Pistachios are not only good for brain health but are also a rich source of healthy fats. – Pixabay

“The high price of pistachios has also led to counterfeit versions – from green colouring to mixed pastes that contain little to no real pistachio,” he said, adding that this compromises culinary integrity and diminishes the true gastronomic experience.

Meanwhile, Faten Abdunroha



Pistachios can be transformed into a paste, roughly chopped for added texture, or blended into a smooth cream. – Photos: Bernama

Kama, a dietetics officer from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Universiti Putra Malaysia, said pistachios are not only good for brain health but are also a rich source of healthy fats, protein, fibre, and antioxidants. These qualities make them a suitable healthy snack choice that supports heart health and promotes longer satiety when consumed in moderation.

However, she cautioned consumers to be wary of pistachio-flavoured products like syrups, pastes, and artificial flavourings, which tend to have higher sugar, fat, and artificial colouring content than real pistachios.

Furthermore, pistachio processing methods – such as roasting and grinding to extend shelf life, or modifying flavour through the addition of salt, milk, flour, or coffee – significantly reduce the nut’s nutritional value.

“Modern desserts on the market such as cakes and gelato often fall into the category of ultra-processed foods. They are made with various additives like sweeteners, colourants, preservatives, and artificial flavourings.

“Although they contain pistachios, frequent consumption is not recommended. Ultra-processed foods are low in nutritional quality and high in refined sugars and trans fats, increasing the risk of weight gain or obesity, and subsequently chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart problems, and high cholesterol,” she said. – Bernama



Pistachio ice cream, anyone?