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Pass (up) the ketchup: 6 condiments with a worldly flair



Photo courtesy of Alexandra Grablewski

Arrope is a versatile condiment perfect for everything from pork loin to ice cream.

By Bao Ong

New Year's resolutions inevitably involve food — dieting, shunning carbs, going macrobiotic or gluten-free, [eating](#) more vegetables — the list goes on. But if you're looking to stretch your culinary horizons without going too far out, condiments are a good way to go.

You can dip a little or smear a lot on the most basic of dishes to give classic favorites a new twist. So put aside the mayo and ketchup for a moment and take a chance on these alternatives: They might even help you keep your resolutions intact.

Arrope



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When you break open a jar of arroepe, your inner gourmand comes out. This thick grape concentrate with Arabic roots made its way to Spain when the Moors invaded the country and is used in many Spanish restaurants today. For the home cook, arroepe is an especially versatile condiment.

With its molasses-like color and caramel flavors, it's often drizzled over ice cream and cheese. Try spreading a thin layer of arroepe jam over cheesecake to give it a jolt of intense flavor. It also pairs well with savory dishes like duck confit and foie gras. For the health-conscious, arroepe is also also great drizzled atop roasted root vegetables.

Matcha

There's likely a stash of green tea lurking somewhere in your cupboards. But what about matcha, the powdered form of green tea? We all know about the benefits of green tea (basically how rich it is in antioxidants), but matcha takes it to another level.

[Matcha Source](#) is a great site to get you started. Founder Alissa White has described the benefits of Matcha on many fronts, including helping [your body](#) detox and boosting your metabolism. Matcha, which has a more intense green tea flavor and is grittier in texture, is perfect for mixing with smoothies and lattes. You can also try making cupcakes or truffles. Once a part of elaborate Japanese tea ceremonies, matcha is definitely worth trying in 2012.

Fish sauce

You might not consider using fish sauce at first glance. After all, it's a condiment made from fermented fish. Across southeast Asia, however, it's a common ingredient in countless recipes. No, you don't have to make nuoc cham (a Vietnamese dipping sauce) or even pad Thai to use fish sauce. With its umami flavor, fish sauce is perfect in a spaghetti sauce. It's like adding anchovies without buying the little fish or having to [eat](#) them. You can also throw it in marinades that go especially well with burgers, giving them a more complex flavor that turns a bit sweet when cooked.

Kimchi

It wasn't too long ago that kimchi was considered a simple side dish accompanying your Korean barbecue. With the rise of Korean cuisine's popularity and the cult-like following of the Kogi truck, which hawks Korean tacos in Los Angeles, kimchi all of a sudden became a key ingredient at restaurants across the country.

Koreans have eaten this typically spicy condiment — there are hundreds of varieties of this fermented dish but you may be most familiar with the cabbage version — at each meal. You can easily incorporate kimchi into all meals. At [breakfast](#), slivers of kimchi thrown into an omelet or egg sandwich can jump-start your day. The flecks of chili peppers can also easily spice up a burger, cole slaw and any number of stir-fry dishes. This is one condiment that's sure to keep your food-related resolutions a reality.

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Photo courtesy of Forever Cheese

Sweet and spicy, mostarda is a perfect pairing with cheese.

Mostarda

Sweet or spicy, mostarda is another condiment you'll want to add to your pantry in the new year. An Italian product, it consists more or less of candied fruits nestled in natural juices, with the addition of mustard oil. But it's not just any mustard oil: In fact, in some parts of Italy, the oil is considered potent enough to be considered hazardous material and is only sold in pharmacies.

You might even call it Italian chutney, there are so many iterations of this condiment. Spread it on cheese or charcuterie. There are also versions you can use in ravioli or to garnish steamed vegetables to add a hint of sweet and sour. Use mostarda for a touch of heat on hearty dishes. Served with a glass of sparkling wine or another crisp white, you can keep the celebration going well into the new year.

Harissa

I'd throw out my bottle of ketchup and tub of salsa to keep a bottle of harissa in my fridge. Not only is this North African chile sauce spicy; it also adds nuance to any number of dishes. I'll spike a bowl of bean soup with a few drops and even drizzle some on a plain old hot dog.

Harissa is made from chilies blended with garlic, salt, oil and a plethora of spices, including coriander and caraway seeds. It's perfect to swirl into a fluffy serving of couscous or a simmering marinara sauce. When you're grilling in warmer months, it's a wonderful condiment for grilled meats and fish. You can either slather some on while your protein is cooking on the grill, or find a marinade recipe to let the flavors develop. One of my favorite uses of harissa is to mix it up with some mayonnaise and use it a sandwich. It

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can take an ordinary sandwich, or any meal for that fact, to a whole new level.

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Tell us, what condiments do you use to give your dishes some extra flair?

Bao Ong is a freelance journalist based in New York. He's also an avid tennis player (mostly because it enables him to eat and drink freely). Follow him on Twitter: [@baohaus](#).

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