

# Q&A Almonds



with  
**Chef Isabel Garcia Nevett**  
Garcia Nevett, Miami, FL

## Innovation with Almond Butter and Chocolate

Isabel Garcia Nevett is co-founder and owner of Garcia Nevett with her sister Susana in Miami, Florida. Drawing inspiration from their South Florida home, Venezuelan roots and shared global adventures, these renowned chocolatiers create exceptional chocolates that leave a lasting impression.

The Almond Board of California (ABC) sat down with Isabel to discuss her perspective on chocolate trends and tips for using almonds and almond butter to appeal to consumers' taste and dietary preferences.

**1** **ABC:** *How have chocolate trends evolved throughout your time as a chocolatier? From your experience having a chocolate business, what are customers looking for in an ideal chocolate product?*

**2** **ABC:** *How would you recommend using almond ingredients like almond butter, almond flour and almond milk in chocolate, especially as plant-based and gluten-free claims proliferate?*

**GARCIA NEVETT:** My sister Susana and I have been in the chocolate business for more than a decade and have seen it evolve. Thanks to the craft chocolate movement that started in the US in the early 2000s, consumers are now exposed to chocolate as a fine food, like fine wine or cheese, rather than just chocolate as a candy or sugary confection. These days customers are expecting higher quality ingredients, elevated use of cacao to ensure its full potential and increasingly sophisticated flavor combinations.

After opening the doors to our brick-and-mortar store in 2018, we noticed our customers were looking for healthier treats. So the process of developing our traditional dark chocolate and almond bark started, and while simple in concept, it has become a fan favorite since launching. With its popularity, we've since created artisan dark chocolate and almond discs as an easy, healthy yet indulgent snack option. Good quality dark chocolate and almonds are both naturally dairy-free, gluten-free and vegan, so combining the two creates a gourmet treat that feels as indulgent as any other. We steer clear of saying "guilty pleasure" and just call dark chocolate and almonds an everyday treat. Chocolate is full of antioxidants and good cholesterol, while almonds add even more benefits with their well-rounded nutrient package and healthy halo.

**GARCIA NEVETT:** The versatility of almonds is what really stands out to me. Their mild, slightly sweet flavor and crunchy texture complement both sweet and savory confections.

Getting the mouthfeel right in plant-based confections can be a challenge, but **almond butter** is a versatile and nutritious option that offers the same creaminess as dairy. It also brings a subtle nutty flavor, adding depth and complexity that complements a wide range of ingredients. When I was growing up, almond butter was not readily available in Venezuela, but we did have almond marzipan, which we often used for that same luscious texture and rich flavor. What I love most about almond ingredients is how versatile they are, if you don't have a certain form, it's easy to utilize others to achieve the product you want.

When creating gluten-free or dairy-free confections, the consistency and flavor isn't always what we want it to be. **Almond milk** and **almond flour** make it easy to get right. Almond milk adds a smooth and creamy texture and mild, natural sweetness to balance the bitterness of a higher cacao-percentage. Almond flour is a great substitute in gluten-free desserts, offering moisture and density that prevent dryness.



**Innova Insight:** Innova reports almond butter & paste (+11%) is one of the fastest-growing almond ingredient forms in chocolate confectionery between 2019-2023. Almond flour (+31%) as one of the fastest-growing almond ingredient forms in chocolate confectionery between 2019-2023<sup>1</sup>.

**3 ABC:** *Do you have any ingredient trend predictions for the future?*

**GARCIA NEVETT:** **Plant-based and vegan desserts that don't compromise taste and texture.** More consumers are seeking dairy-free and egg-free options, which calls for creativity to maintain flavor and texture. Innovations in plant-based ingredients, like the vast array of almond butter formulations, make it easier to create decadent vegan desserts. You can customize the texture to make it what you want while adding a desirable creaminess, all without overpowering the overall flavor profile of your confection.

**A focus on purity and integrity of ingredients.** Minimalist and clean-label desserts will be in high demand, emphasizing the importance of quality over quantity. The result? Desserts that are both delicious and transparently wholesome. Almonds are perfect as-is and pair wonderfully with few or many ingredients, depending on the dessert you're creating.

**Environmental responsibility.** Supporting a sustainable cocoa supply chain will appeal to consumers who prioritize environmental responsibility and support for local economies. Consider using ingredients that have a great story to tell. Ingredients like [almonds](#) are often grown by multi-generational family farms and support pollinator health as a natural source of nutrients for the bee population.



**Innova Insight:** Real and natural ingredients, low/no/reduced sugar, no artificial flavors/colors, and low/no/reduced fat are the claims that most influence global consumers' purchase decisions.<sup>2</sup>

**4 ABC:** *From a versatility and consumer experience standpoint, why do you enjoy working with almond ingredients?*

**GARCIA NEVETT:** Almonds are very reminiscent of my childhood. Some of my first experiences with almonds were the traditional sugar or chocolate-coated almonds served at Christenings and First Communion. One of the first chocolates we created at Garcia Nevett using almonds was our simple milk chocolate and almond nougat bonbon, inspired by the delicious "turrone de almendras" imported from Spain to Venezuela during the Christmas season. We paired this hard nougat, chopped into tiny pieces, with a 40% milk chocolate from Venezuela to give it a delightful sweetness and velvety mouthfeel.

Incorporating almonds in their many forms creates chocolates that are not only delicious and nostalgic but also are perceived as more wholesome and nutritious. The subtle, nutty flavor of almonds complements the rich, complex taste of our high-quality chocolate, all to enhance our creations without overpowering them. The different forms of almonds add a pleasing range of textures, from the satisfying crunch of whole pieces to the creamy smoothness of almond butter, that elevate the sensory experience of our chocolates to make each bite more enjoyable. Almond ingredients also allow us to cater to a wide range of dietary needs so more people can enjoy our chocolates and we can appeal to a diverse audience.

**5 ABC:** *Do you have any other advice for chocolate manufacturers hoping to create craveable experiences for today's consumer?*

**GARCIA NEVETT:** Prioritize the quality of ingredients above all else. Consumers today are more discerning and knowledgeable about what goes into their food. They value transparency and sustainability, so it's crucial to source ethically produced, high-quality cocoa and ingredients like almonds.

To stay relevant in the market, don't lose sight of innovation. Global culinary trends are a great source of inspiration for exotic and exciting elements in your chocolate and to experiment with new flavors, textures, and forms that set your products apart. It's also essential to listen to customer feedback and observe trends in dietary preferences.

**If you're looking for inspiration on how to incorporate almonds in chocolate, look no further than ABC's [Almond Butter and Chocolate Masterclass](#), developed in collaboration with [Ecole Chocolat](#). [Learn from Isabel as well as Michelle Novosel of Pizzelle's Confections and T Lawrence-Simon of Cirque du Souffle on how to incorporate almonds in your chocolate products, so consumers will come back for more.](#)**

<sup>1</sup> Innova Market Insights. Winning Opportunities in Chocolate Confectionery with Almonds. Released April 2024.  
<sup>2</sup> Innova Market Insights. Winning Opportunities in Chocolate Confectionery with Almonds. Released April 2024.