

Fresh, Flavourful, Sun-kissed



The heat may be in overdrive mode,
but food in summer is all about meals
that are hot yet cool...

By Bindu Gopal Rao

Restaurants are reinterpreting familiar ingredients in ways that surprise diners while still respecting their traditional flavours.

The arrival of summer has been a game changer for local markets, brimming with fresh seasonal produce that brings on a lot of unyielding passion amongst chefs to create seasonal specials.

Season Reason

Chefs are reinterpreting summer produce, mango, kokum, jamun, tender coconut, and gourds to create dishes that are a nod to the season. These ingredients now feature in trending menus with various innovative gourmet dishes offering an experiential journey to the guest.

Tanuj Bahuguna, Executive Chef, Taj Taal Kutir, Kolkata, says, “Mango is one of the key ingredients being used beyond tradition, embarking on a successful approach with the curation of cultural fusion, modern patisserie, and savoury gourmet food. Mango ceviche stands out as one of the best examples as a replacement for seafood in Peruvian cuisine. The best utilisation of kokum and tender coconut goes beyond refreshing beverages and is best to be used in the creation of exotic sorbets, ice creams and curries from coastal cuisine.”

The latest ingredient that has gone through major reinterpretation in modern culinary, considering the past few years, jamun is ideal for beverage and cocktail innovations. Also having a unique sweet and sour taste along with a sharp flavour, jamun stands out as the best in fusion food, modern confectionery, and wellness cuisine.

“Once one of the most overlooked vegetables, gourds are turning out to be one of the most



Modern techniques help reveal new personalities in seasonal produce



Summer produce is a favourite among chefs for its bold flavours, refreshing textures, and adaptability across cuisines.



Tanuj Bahuguna, Executive Chef,
Taj Taal Kutir, Kolkata



Girish Saklani, Executive Chef,
Mulberry Shades Bengaluru Nandi
Hills, A Tribute Portfolio Resort



Karan Thakur, Executive Chef,
The Leela Palace New Delhi



MasterChef Bala Subramaniam,
The Orchid Hotel, Mumbai



Summer produce shines across multiple formats, but lighter plates and refreshing preparations are especially effective.

“Gourds are turning out to be one of the most versatile and sophisticated ingredients in modern-day culinary, and also, a key ingredient to create vegan and gluten-free menus.”

- Tanuj Bahuguna

versatile and sophisticated ingredients in modern-day culinary. Also, a key ingredient that stands out well to create vegan and gluten-free menus, bottle gourd hummus stands out to be one of the best examples for the same,” adds Bahuguna.

Twist of Taste

Restaurants are reinterpreting familiar ingredients in ways that surprise diners while still respecting their traditional flavours. The key is to preserve the soul of the ingredient while changing the experience around it.

“At Mulberry Shades, we often approach familiar produce through texture, plating, and technique rather than overcomplicating flavour. For instance, kokum may be reimagined as a granita or glaze; tender coconut can feature in delicate broths or light desserts, while raw mango lends itself beautifully to dressings, sorbets, Asian-style salads, or gently cured preparations. We aim to create a sense of discovery while ensuring the ingredient still tastes recognisably true to itself,” says Girish Saklani, Executive Chef, Mulberry Shades Bengaluru Nandi Hills, A Tribute Portfolio Resort.

The idea is to retain the familiarity of flavour while refining how it is presented. Aam panna, for example, can move beyond being just a drink and be incorporated into a meal in a subtler way while still keeping its core identity intact. Similarly, ingredients like lauki can be treated with more attention to texture and presentation, without losing their simplicity. It’s about evolving the experience, not the essence.



Mango is one of the key ingredients being used beyond tradition, embarking on a successful approach with the curation of cultural fusion, modern patisserie, and savoury gourmet food

Summer Story

Summer produce is inspiring as it naturally carries contrast—sweetness, acidity, bitterness, and freshness. Summer ingredients are inherently hydrating, vibrant, and don't require too much intervention. It's a season that encourages restraint, where the focus is on letting the ingredient take centre stage.

“The summer produce in India continues to offer versatility that can be explored across different types of cuisines and flavours, helping create something that feels both cohesive and dynamic. Since modern Indian cuisine is increasingly focusing on clarity, balance, and precision rather than excess, I feel that there is a clear shift towards ingredient-led dishes, and that having access to such amazing seasonal produce in India only enables us to experiment more,” says Karan Thakur, Executive Chef, The Leela Palace New Delhi.

Rediscovering Old Favourites

Summer produce is a favourite among chefs for its bold flavours, refreshing textures, and adaptability across cuisines. At its peak, these ingredients bring a natural brightness to dishes, inspiring creative and seasonal menus that highlight the diversity of India's harvest. Sourced locally, they not only ensure optimal freshness and taste but also contribute to a more sustainable and mindful approach to cooking.

“Gourds, particularly ash gourd and bottle gourd, are often overlooked. In South Indian cuisine, they play a vital role in

“Sweet ingredients, like mango, shine when paired with citrus or a hint of vinegar—while the tangy bitterness of kokum finds balance in creamy elements.”

— Sagar Moy



Modern summer cuisine focuses on balance across temperature, texture, and flavour rather than traditional course structures.



Sagar Moy, Sous Chef, Sayaji Hotel Wakad, Pune



Charanjit Singh, Executive Chef, Polo Towers, Shillong

“Fermentation adds depth, smoking enhances complexity, and dehydration intensifies flavour. Even controlled charring can bring richness.”

— Charanjit Singh

dishes like kootu and avial, offering subtle sweetness and a beautiful ability to absorb spices. When handled with care, they can be transformed into elegant preparations that surprise diners with their depth and versatility,” says MasterChef Bala Subramaniam, The Orchid Hotel, Mumbai.

Likewise, phalsa is often overlooked. It has a delicate acidity with a slightly floral note, which makes it more nuanced than sharper citrus. It works particularly well in both savoury and lighter courses because it adds freshness without overpowering the dish. It’s an ingredient that lends itself naturally to a more refined style of cooking.

Balancing Flavours

Balance comes from thoughtful pairing and restraint. Sweet ingredients like ripe mango work well with spice, herbs, or a touch of citrus. Kokum’s bright tang can be softened with natural sweetness or richness, while jamun pairs beautifully with yoghurt, honey, or mild spices.

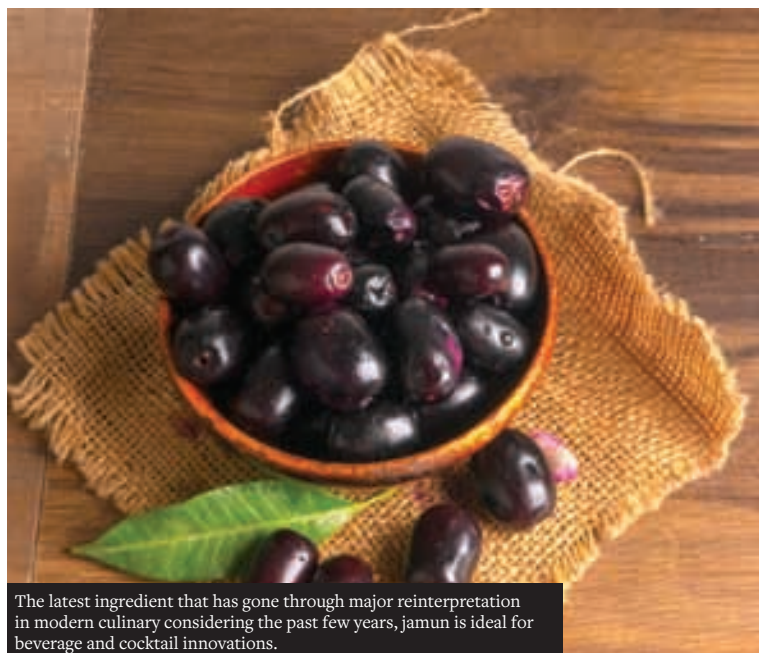
Sagar Moy, Sous Chef, Sayaji Hotel Wakad, Pune, says, “Great dishes are built on harmony. Sweet ingredients, like mango, shine brighter when paired with a touch of acidity—citrus or a hint of vinegar—while the tangy bitterness of kokum finds balance in creamy elements. Spices act as the bridge, bringing everything together. It’s this interplay of contrasts and complements that creates depth, elevating a dish from good to truly memorable.”

Balance is achieved through layering rather than reduction. Sweetness is grounded with salt or fat, acidity is rounded with warmth or spice, and bitterness is structured through texture. The goal is harmony where each element remains distinct but integrated.

Treat Them Right

Modern techniques help reveal new personalities in seasonal produce. Fermentation adds complexity and depth, especially to fruits and gourds. Pickling enhances brightness and preserves freshness. Dehydration intensifies flavour and creates interesting textures, while smoking can bring warmth and contrast to otherwise delicate ingredients. Even simple methods like slow roasting, curing, or cold infusion can transform summer produce into something pleasantly unexpected while retaining its natural character.

Charanjit Singh, Executive Chef, Polo Towers, Shillong, says, “Fermentation, smoking, pickling, and dehydration are key techniques that help unlock new dimensions. Fermentation adds depth, smoking enhances complexity, and dehydration



The latest ingredient that has gone through major reinterpretation in modern culinary considering the past few years, jamun is ideal for beverage and cocktail innovations.

intensifies flavour. Even controlled charring can bring richness without overpowering the ingredient’s natural identity.” Regional varieties bring freshness, authenticity, and a stronger sense of place to the menu.

Contemporary Cues

Summer produce shines across multiple formats, but lighter plates and refreshing preparations are especially effective. Indian summer ingredients have tremendous potential to define the future of modern cuisine because they are diverse, climate-relevant, and rooted in tradition. It is not about category but contrast. Warm dishes with cooling elements, desserts with spice, and savoury-fruit combinations work best. Modern summer cuisine focuses on balance across temperature, texture, and flavour rather than traditional course structures.

As diners increasingly value seasonality, wellness, sustainability, and local sourcing, these ingredients will become even more central to menu design. We will see chefs celebrating produce like kokum, jamun, gourds, raw mango, jackfruit, palm fruit, and tender coconut in more contemporary ways. The future of Indian food lies not in moving away from our ingredients, but in rediscovering them with a new perspective and technique. ■