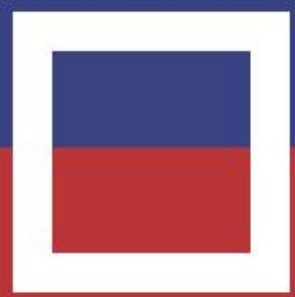




INGREDIENT OF THE MONTH



American Culinary Federation
Education Foundation

ALL ABOUT CHILI CRISP

Chili crisp, also known as chili crunch, is a spicy, crunchy, umami-packed condiment that has won over chefs and food lovers worldwide. It originated in Chinese cuisine, where chili-infused oils have been used for centuries. In southern China, ingredients are simmered in oil, while in the north, hot oil is poured over spices to create a fragrant, textured topping. Each region, and often each household, has its own version, making it a personal and culturally rich tradition.



Globally, variations of chili crisp exist under different names and formats. In Mexico, salsa macha shares a similar composition, using local chiles and nuts. In Cambodia, Mama Teav's offers a garlic-forward version based on a family recipe.

The condiment gained international prominence in 1997 when Tao Huabi, a Chinese restaurateur, began commercial production under the Lao Gan Ma brand in Guizhou province. Her chili crisp quickly became a pantry staple in China and found a cult following abroad. Lao Gan Ma is credited with popularizing Chinese chili oil and chili crisp toppings in the Western world.

The condiment saw a new wave of popularity in the U.S. in the late 2010s, with a surge in interest during the COVID-19 pandemic, as home cooks explored bold new flavors. Despite its humble roots, chili crisp has become a gourmet item, appearing in fine-dining dishes, fusion cuisine, and even desserts like vanilla ice cream, where its savory heat contrasts beautifully with sweet flavors.

In 2023, a trademark was secured for "chile crunch" and "chili crunch," sending cease-and-desist letters to small producers using similar terms. This triggered backlash over the trademarking of a traditional condiment's name, with critics arguing it commodifies cultural heritage.

HEALTHY INGREDIENT CONTRIBUTION

Chili crisp, while best known for its bold flavor and texture, also contains several ingredients with potential health benefits though it's important to note that it's typically used in moderation due to its high oil content. Listed below you will find ingredients commonly found in chili crisp and what potential health benefits they contribute.



- **Chilies:** Chilies are rich in capsaicin, the compound responsible for their heat. Capsaicin has been studied for its anti-inflammatory, metabolism-boosting, and pain-relief properties. It may also help reduce appetite and support cardiovascular health.
- **Garlic:** Garlic is a well-known antimicrobial and immune-supporting ingredient. It contains compounds like allicin, which may help reduce blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and support heart health.
- **Shallot/Onion:** These add depth of flavor and are sources of antioxidants, such as quercetin, which has anti-inflammatory and antihistamine effects.
- **Sichuan Peppercorns:** These unique peppercorns contain hydroxy-alpha-sanshool, which has been linked to mild pain-relieving effects. They may also stimulate digestion and circulation.
- **Fermented Ingredients:** Ingredients such as fermented soybeans or black beans offer gut-friendly probiotics and enzymes that aid digestion and nutrient absorption.
- **Neutral Oils:** While oils like soybean or canola are typically used and are calorie-dense, some artisanal versions use healthier oils such as olive oil, which is high in monounsaturated fats and may support heart health.

Nutritional Information/Values from [USDA FoodData Central](#)

TYPES AND VARIETIES

Chili crisp comes in a wide range of styles, reflecting regional traditions, ingredient variations, and modern culinary twists. While the core idea remains the same, crispy bits suspended in flavorful chili oil, there are many distinct types and varieties of chili crisp found around the world and on store shelves today.

Global Variations

Lao Gan Ma (China)

- Original chili crisp from Guizhou province
- Dried chili, fermented soybeans, garlic, peanuts
- Mild to medium heat, strong umami

Sichuan-Style (China)

- Includes Sichuan peppercorns for numbing sensation
- Garlic, ginger, star anise, sesame seeds
- Popular in Chengdu and Chongqing cuisine

Salsa Macha (Mexico)

- Often uses olive oil or avocado oil as base
- Dried chiles, nuts, seeds, garlic
- Smokier and nuttier than Chinese varieties

Nam Prik Pao (Thailand)

- Chili jam with sweet, savory, and smoky notes
- Palm sugar, tamarind, dried shrimp, fish sauce

Artisanal & Modern Brands

Fly By Jing

- Sichuan-inspired, small batch
- Features all natural ingredients
- Known for a balance of heat, numbing, and umami

Momofuku Chili Crunch

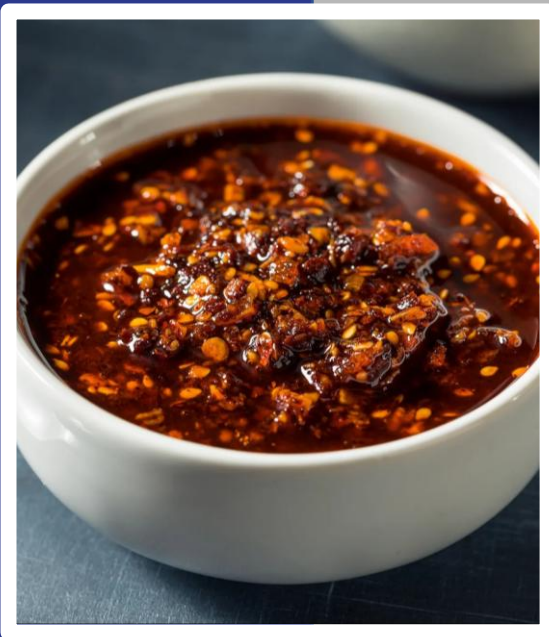
- Created by Chef David Chang
- Uses chili flakes, garlic, shallots, sesame, and seaweed
- Several variations including black truffle and hot honey

Boon Sauce

- LA-based chili crisp with Southeast Asian influence
- Garlic-heavy, slightly sweet, and a rich, smoky flavor

Zhong Sauce

- Sweet, savory, and slightly spicy dipping sauce
- Chili oil-based but thicker and richer



SELECTING AND STORING

Selecting Chili Crisp:

- **Flavor Profile**
 - **Spicy vs. Mild:** Some varieties bring intense heat while others are milder and more aromatic
 - **Umami Depth:** Look for versions with fermented soybeans, mushrooms, or seaweed for savory complexity
 - **Sweet or Smoky:** Mexican-style salsa macha or versions with added sugar or smoked chilies may have a sweeter or smokier character
- **Texture**
 - Chunky variations contain generous pieces of garlic, shallots, or peanuts
 - Finer blends may be more oil-based with fewer crunchy bits
- **Dietary Considerations**
 - **Vegan or Vegetarian:** Some chili crisps include dried shrimp or fish sauce but others are entirely plant-based
 - **Low Sodium/Oil:** Options may be available for those watching their intake
- **Usage Intent:**
 - For versatile, everyday use, go with a classic and select variations with unusual ingredients like black truffle for special pairings
- **Packaging & Quality:**
 - Opt for jars with clear expiration dates and ingredient lists
 - Small-batch or artisanal products often use better quality oils and spices but may be pricier



Storing Chili Crisp:

- **Unopened Jar:** Store in a cool, dark pantry away from direct sunlight and monitor best-by date
- **After Opening:** Shelf stable after opening but refrigeration is recommended
- **Shelf Life:** In refrigeration it can keep for 6 months to a year but may go rancid or spoil quicker when in warmer climates left at room temperature

CULINARY USES

Breakfast & Morning

- Drizzled over eggs or mixed into egg salad
- Spicy compound butter for toast
- Breakfast grain bowls with soft-boiled egg

Snacks & Appetizers

- Pair with grilled bread and cheese
- Whipped into feta or labneh for mezze
- Fold into biscuit or muffin batters

Salads & Vegetables

- Whisked into vinaigrettes and dressings
- Drizzled over charred vegetables
- Mixed into pickle brines

Noodles & Rice

- Use as base for Sichuan-style cold noodle salads
- Add crunch and spice to poke bowls
- Finish stir-fried greens and proteins

Proteins & Mains

- Marinade base or finishing oil for beef and chicken
- Blend into mayo, aioli, and finishing sauces
- Marinate tofu for bowls and skewers

Baked Goods & Carbs

- Incorporate into focaccia, cornbread, or bagels
- Pair with chocolate and peanut butter
- Flavor ice cream and gelato bases

Cross-Cultural Pairings

- Falafel & Tahini
- Tacos & Crema
- Grilled Cheese & Tomato

Drinks & Other

- Rimming glasses with salt and sesame
- Blend into mezcal-based cocktails
- Combine with caramel for a spicy dessert sauce



INTERESTING FACTS



- Between 2020 and 2023, U.S. sales of chili crisp and chili oils grew over 300%
- Often dubbed the "OG" of chili crisp, Lao Gan Ma sells over a million jars daily worldwide while the "Fly by Jing" brand hit \$10 million in revenue in 2022
- In China, over 40 counterfeit versions of Lao Gan Ma appeared in the early 2000s prompting lawsuits and government crackdowns
- While exact figures vary by region, the chili crisp and chili oil condiment category is estimated to be worth over \$100 million globally
- Searches for #chilicrisp have topped 100+ million views across social platforms
- Small-batch brands like "Freaky Ferments" have created extreme heat versions of chili crisp using the Carolina Reaper chili pepper
- At events like the Specialty Food Association's SOFI Awards, chili crisps are now an entire subcategory, with artisan entries competing on flavor complexity, innovation, and sustainability
- Services like The Spicy Box and Chili Crisp Club offer monthly deliveries of curated hot oils and chili crisps from around the world
- In 2024, Panda Express, Shake Shack, and Sweetgreen all tested or released limited-run chili crisp-inspired menu items

RECIPE

Chili Crisp Pickled Melon Salad

Yield: 4 Servings

Ingredients:

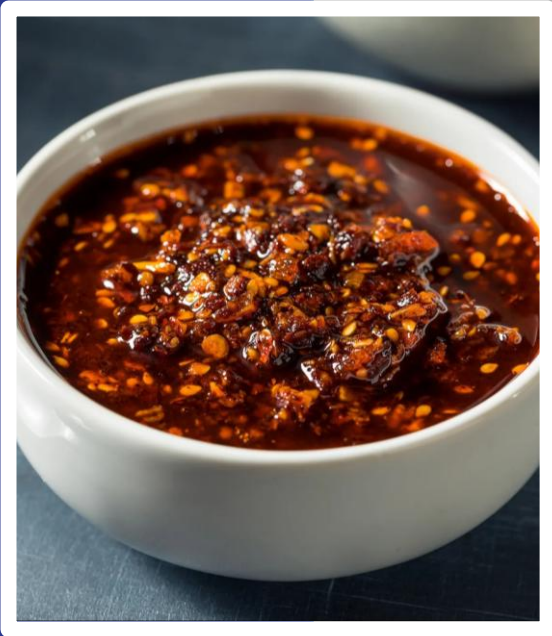
¼ Cup Rice Wine Vinegar
2 Tsp Sugar
½ Tsp Kosher Salt
½ Lime, Zested
1 Cup Cantaloupe, ¾-inch Cubed
1 Cup Watermelon, ¾-inch Cubed
1 Cup Cucumber, Small Dice
2 Tbsp Chili Crisp
¼ Cup Feta Cheese, Crumbled
2 Tbsp Peanuts, Toasted & Chopped
1 Tbsp Lime Juice
1 Tbsp Mint, Chiffonade
1 Tsp Sesame Oil
Flaky Salt, To Finish



Directions:

1. In a medium bowl, whisk together the rice vinegar, sugar, salt, and lime zest until dissolved. Add melon cubes and gently toss to coat.
2. Let sit in the fridge for at least 30 minutes (or up to 2 hours) to chill and lightly pickle.
3. After pickling, drain off the liquid, don't rinse. In a large serving bowl, combine the melon, cucumber, and lime juice. Toss gently.
4. Drizzle with chili crisp, letting both oil and crispy bits coat the salad. Top with feta, peanuts, herbs, and a small drizzle of sesame oil if using.
5. Finish with a pinch of flaky salt and more chili crisp to taste.

QUIZ



After you read through this month's Ingredient of the Month, take this quiz to test your knowledge. In order to earn continuing education hours (CEHs) from the American Culinary Federation (ACF), the test must be completed through the ACF's Online Learning Center. Seventy-five percent accuracy is required to earn one hour of continuing education credits toward professional certification.

QUIZ

Question #1

Who helped bring chili crisp to international prominence with commercial production?

- A. David Chang
- B. Tao Huabi
- C. Roy Choi
- D. Andrea Nguyen

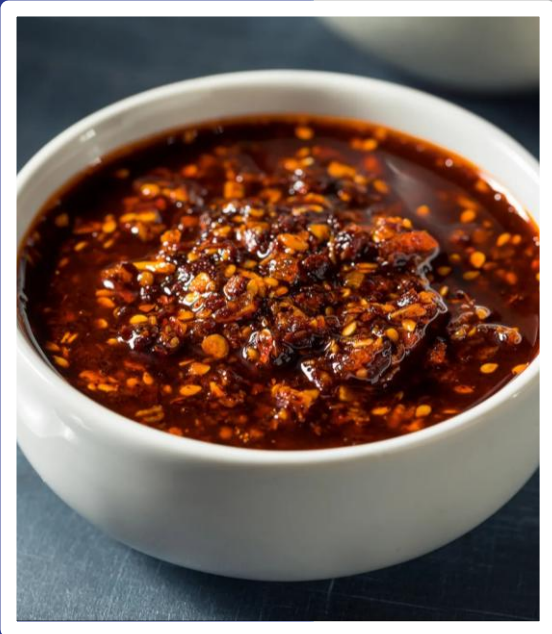


QUIZ

Question #2

The trademarking of the terms “chili crunch” and “chile crunch” in 2023 caused controversy because:

- A. It banned imports of Lao Gan Ma
- B. It was enforced by the Chinese government
- C. It was seen as commodifying a cultural tradition
- D. It raised food safety concerns



QUIZ

Question #3

Which compound in chilies is responsible for their heat and associated health benefits?

- A. Allicin
- B. Quercetin
- C. Sanshool
- D. Capsaicin



QUIZ

Question #4



Which ingredient in chili crisp contains hydroxy-alpha-sanshool, which may have pain-relieving effects?

- A. Fermented Black Beans
- B. Garlic
- C. Sichuan Peppercorns
- D. Shallots

QUIZ

Question #5



Which chili crisp brand is known for incorporating seaweed, garlic, and has flavor variations like black truffle and hot honey?

- A. Boon Sauce
- B. Fly By Jing
- C. Momofuku Chili Crunch
- D. Zhong Sauce

QUIZ

Question #6

Zhong Sauce is oil-based but thicker and used more like a dipping sauce than a topping.

- A. True
- B. False

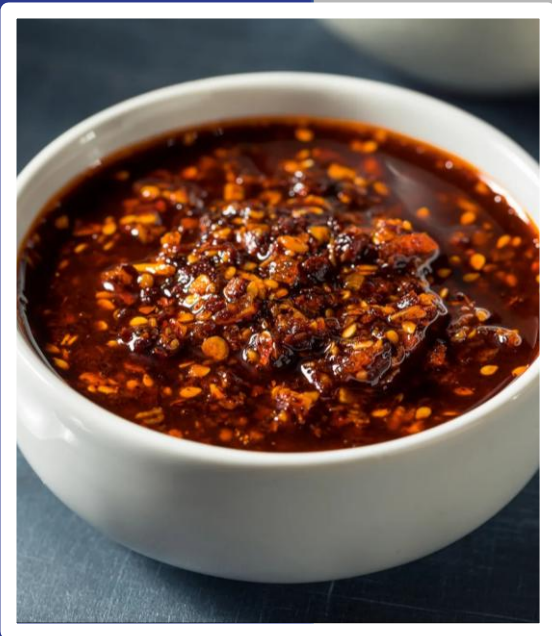


QUIZ

Question #7

Why might someone choose a small-batch or artisanal chili crisp?

- A. It is cheaper
- B. It uses better quality ingredients
- C. It uses more ingredients
- D. It is usually less spicy

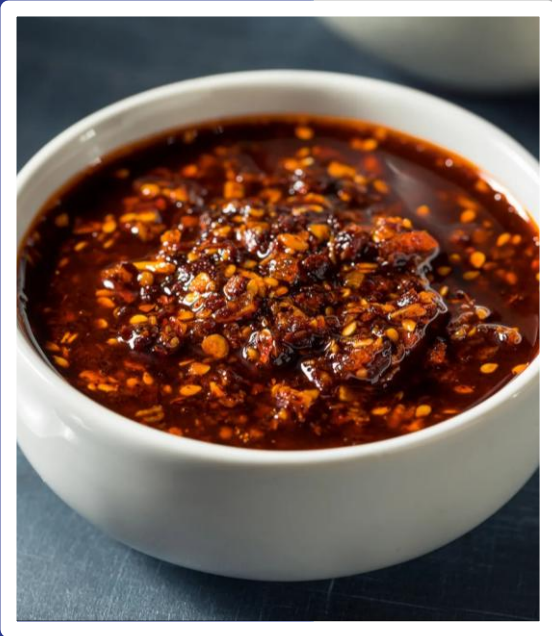


QUIZ

Question #8

Refrigerating chili crisp, often very perishable, after opening can help it last up to 3 months.

- A. True
- B. False

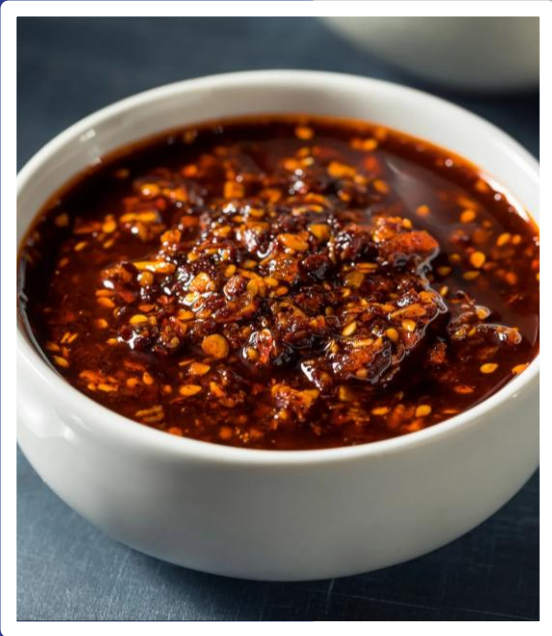


QUIZ

Question #9

It's not safe or recommended to use chili crisp in baked goods like cornbread or focaccia.

- A. True
- B. False



QUIZ

Question #10

The global market value of the chili crisp and chili oil condiment category is estimated at over:

- A. \$10 Million
- B. \$50 Million
- C. \$100 Million
- D. \$500 Million



JOIN US NEXT MONTH!

Stay tuned for the next ACF Ingredient of the Month! Be sure to visit the Online Learning Center (OLC) to download a copy of each month's ingredient presentation. Don't forget to take the official IOTM quiz through the OLC to earn one hour of continuing education credits toward professional certification.

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