

Insects Innovation in Gastronomy

COURSE SUPPORT



Module 2 Unit 1:

How to propose rare and unusual ingredients in your restaurant for economic and environmental sustainability

Disclaimer:

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In this unit we will explore how psychology, culture, and sustainable food choices intersect. Our focus is on understanding why people resist eating insects and how we can encourage their acceptance in modern gastronomy. While insects have been part of human diets for centuries, they are often met with hesitation in Western cultures. Understanding the roots of this resistance, and learning how to overcome it, can unlock a world of sustainable, nutritious, and exciting culinary experiences.

Why does the brain resist eating insects?

The aversion to eating insects is not merely a matter of taste; it's deeply ingrained in both human instincts and cultural norms. Evolutionarily, our ancestors relied on caution when approaching unfamiliar foods. Insects, often linked to decay or contamination, triggered an instinctive sense of danger. This protective mechanism was vital for survival, but in modern times, it continues to shape how we perceive edible insects. Cultural conditioning reinforces this resistance. In Western societies, insects have rarely been part of traditional cuisine, unlike in many regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where they are valued as delicacies. Without positive exposure or culinary familiarity, insects remain firmly associated with discomfort and disgust. Yet, just as we can develop a taste for coffee, spicy food, or unfamiliar vegetables, insect consumption can become normalized through repeated, positive encounters. The psychological concept known as the *Mere Exposure Effect* explains how repeated experiences with something new can gradually transform apprehension into comfort. Each positive encounter chips away at resistance.

The key lies in introducing insects within familiar contexts. Blending cricket flour into bread, pasta, or energy bars allows diners to experience their nutritional benefits without confronting whole insects directly. Adding roasted crickets as a crunchy topping to a well-loved salad or incorporating insect protein into cookies builds trust and minimizes anxiety. When insects are presented as a natural addition rather than a shocking novelty, they become easier to accept. Beyond taste, social and emotional connections can strengthen positive associations. Offering insect-based foods at social events, cooking classes, or themed dinners transforms an unfamiliar ingredient into a memorable experience. By linking these foods to moments of joy, curiosity begins to replace hesitation.

Overcoming resistance through exposure and the power of familiarity

Once familiarity is established, curiosity opens the door to deeper engagement. Building trust through recognizable recipes allows diners to feel secure, while highlighting insects' nutritional and environmental benefits offers meaningful motivation. Rich in protein, healthy fats, and essential nutrients, insects provide a compelling solution to sustainable food challenges. Positioning them as smart, eco-friendly options encourages people to view them not as a compromise, but as an exciting

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culinary opportunity. Curiosity flourishes when people see others embracing new experiences. Whether through friends, social media influencers, or innovative chefs, observing others enjoy insect-based dishes reduces hesitation. Seeing insects celebrated as gourmet ingredients, rather than unusual oddities, helps reframe their role in modern cuisine.

Storytelling plays an equally powerful role. Sharing the cultural roots of insect consumption or explaining their role in sustainable agriculture creates intrigue. By highlighting the craftsmanship behind dishes like chocolate-covered crickets or roasted grasshoppers, we transform insects from a source of discomfort into a source of discovery.

For adventurous diners, insects offer an exciting challenge. Limited-edition menus, featuring rare and exotic preparations, naturally attract those who seek unique experiences. Creative presentation enhances this appeal. Artistic plating, combined with thoughtful descriptions, can turn insect-based dishes into visual and sensory highlights that excite rather than intimidate.

Interactive dining experiences further amplify this sense of adventure. Chef-led tastings, cooking demonstrations, or storytelling sessions invite diners to engage with their food, turning the unfamiliar into a shared and enjoyable discovery.

Conclusion

We hope this first unit will provide you with valuable insights into how psychology, creativity, and presentation can work together to overcome resistance to eating insects. Thank you for your attention and see you in the next unit.