

THE MAIN EVENT: Top Entrée Trends

Introduction

Despite the small plates trend and even some rumors that the “entrée is dead,” numbers are up for menued entrées. As we look at the main events on restaurant tables across all segments, value is key. For Quick Service restaurants, fried chicken is in decline, but most other chicken preparations show growth, as do pizza and burritos. Fast Casual’s Mexican dishes and chicken are in growth mode. For Family/Midscale Dining restaurants, home-styled platters and breakfast all day lead the way. Within the Casual Dining segment, creative ways with steak keep it cost effective while chicken shows growth. Listed below are current and growing entrée trends across all segments.



Outback Steakhouse® Steak Flights

QSR: Mexican and Chicken Show Growth

Most pizza types are in growth mode in this segment. Slow-cooked proteins add value and variety to QSR sandwiches and wraps. Bold flavorings, in the form of rubs, salsas, marinades and condiments are inexpensive upgrades. Looking beyond frying is a way to keep health-minded diners interested in fast food.

- Taco Bell- Power Protein Bowl:** Romaine lettuce, topped with a double-portion of selected meat, black beans, roasted corn-and-pepper salsa, pico de gallo, guacamole and reduced-fat sour cream.
- Popeye’s- Zatarain’s Butterfly Shrimp LTO:** This combo offering features eight shrimp, Cajun fries, a biscuit and lemon garlic dipping sauce (Popeye’s signature sauce includes parsley and red pepper flakes).

TOP 10 MENUED QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANT ENTREES (% CHANGE Q1 2010 – Q1 2013)		
Rank	Item	(% change)
1	Fried Chicken	-10%
2	Supreme Pizza	8%
3	Cheese Pizza	20%
4	Chicken Fingers	6%
5	Vegetable Pizza	4%
6	Pizza (Unspecified)	15%
7	Pizza Toppings	18%
8	Meat Pizza	-7%
9	Chicken	10%
10	Breakfast Burrito	50%

Fast Casual: Focuses on Value

Cost-effective, bread- and pasta-based dishes are being added to the menu despite rising gluten-free demands; offering some gluten-free options makes for broader appeal. Rice bowls are also on the rise, showing operators are meeting demands for more value-minded meals, and most pizza types are growing.

- Baja Fresh Mexican Grill- Skinny Wahoo Bowl:** Fire-grilled Wahoo, black beans, lime rice, cilantro, cabbage, pico de gallo, salsa cream, avocado salsa, topped with mango salsa.
- Chipotle Mexican Grill (in test markets)- Sofritas:** Made with shredded organic tofu from a producer in Oakland, CA, that’s braised with chile, roasted poblano peppers and other spices; the item will be offered as a filling in burritos, tacos, burrito bowls and salads.

TOP 10 MENUED FAST CASUAL DINING ENTREES (% CHANGE Q1 2010 – Q1 2013)		
Rank	Item	(% change)
1	Nachos	45%
2	Pizza	-26%
3	Taco	27%
4	Chicken Fingers	60%
5	Rice Bowl	36%
6	Burrito	-21%
7	Cheese Pizza	60%
8	Pasta-Spaghetti	56%
9	Pepperoni Pizza	18%
10	Chicken	9%



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Family/Midscale: Down-Home Dinners Dominate

Family-focused dining is a story of abundance, breakfast all-day and piled on pancakes. Home-styled, stick-to-your-ribs food keeps the focus on value and comfort. Despite rising costs, beef still tops the most menued list and pizza and pancakes get more elaborate.

- **Cracker Barrel- Seasonal Sampler:** A hearty sampling of Chicken n’ Dumplings, Meatloaf, and Country or Sugar Cured Ham. Served with your choice of any three Country Vegetables, including new options like lightly seasoned fresh steamed broccoli, plus made-from-scratch buttermilk biscuits or corn muffins.
- **Denny’s- BBQ Pepper Jack Country-Fried Steak:** LTO- Dinner-sized Country-Fried Steak smothered in Pepper Jack cheese sauce, topped with fire-roasted peppers and onions and onion straws. Drizzled with BBQ sauce and served with your choice of two sides and dinner bread.

TOP 10 MENUED FAMILY/MIDSCALE DINING ENTREES (% CHANGE Q1 2010 – Q1 2013)		
Rank	Item	(% change)
1	Steak	10%
2	Pancakes	8%
3	Platter	7%
4	Omelette	2%
5	Pizza (Unspecified)	-3%
6	Cheese Pizza	9%
7	Vegetable Pizza	1%
8	Supreme Pizza	2%
9	Chicken	-5%
10	Meat Pizza	32%

Casual Dining: Finding New Ways with Steak

Steak tops the list here, and steak dishes have grown 19%. Rising commodity costs have brought smaller cuts (medallions, tips), surf and turf and other creative steak usage to menus. Chicken breasts show growth and are a less expensive option.

- **Outback Steakhouse- Steak Flights:** Choose your steak and sauces. We’ll cut and grill your steak into two or three portions served atop crispy potato cakes with fresh steamed green beans.
- **Maggiano’s- Tuscan Herb Sirloin Medallions:** Grilled medallions of sirloin and mushrooms topped with a sun-dried tomato vinaigrette served with smoked mozzarella garlic mashed potatoes and grilled asparagus.

TOP 10 MENUED CASUAL DINING ENTREES (% CHANGE Q1 2010 – Q1 2013)		
Rank	Item	(% change)
1	Steak	19%
2	Salmon	32%
3	Chicken Breast	78%
4	Ribs	3%
5	Surf and Turf	39%
6	Entrée Combination	134%
7	Chicken Fingers	1%
8	Mexican Platters	-32%
9	Pasta w/ Chicken	12%
10	Chicken	-6%

Insights to Go

Meat-Free Adds Variety: Skipping meat isn’t just for vegetarians; many seek meatless dishes for variety and better health. Be sure to menu options for them.

Preparation Matters: Grilled is tops for health-minded diners and oven-fried can still deliver crunch. Show variety with cooking techniques as well as ingredients and flavors.

Shift With The Seasons: Keep the protein as standard and make subtle shifts with herbs, vegetables and sauces.

Make It Green: Transform sandwiches, Mexican plates, even Asian noodle bowls into salads for a health halo.

Search High: Fine dining starts entrée trends; stay on top of the latest sauces and other flavoring elements for mainstream potential.



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Source: **MINTEL** Menu Insights