

Confectionery Pastes from Almonds

Sam Cunningham, PhD
Blue Diamond Growers

Confectionery pastes from almonds is a worthy topic if for no other reason than the important role almond pastes have played in the history of confectionery products. If one were to retrace that history, one would see references to almond pastes early in the first chapter, and maybe as the very first topic.

The history of almonds as a human food is even more ancient. Several years ago, I attended a conference and heard Dr. Michael Rosenberg, an archeologist at the University of Indiana. He believes that edible nuts, principally almonds and pistachio nuts, may have led to an important new development some 10,000–12,000 years ago. That development enabled hunter-gatherer societies to form in settled villages, and it was called “agriculture.” By harvesting wild almond trees, early human beings could subsist in a new pattern centered on exploitation of selected plants. Thus almonds may have been a key factor in the very invention of agriculture.

Almond paste or marzipan has been consumed for a long time, at least 1,000 years, and probably much, much longer. We know that almond paste was developed in the Middle East. The Arabs invaded Spain in the 7th century and brought with them a taste for almonds and citrus. Almond paste was probably

ancient, even then. Almonds were traded in the trade routes along with spices, oils and silks. Almonds and the products that can be produced from them have been important foods from that early time and still are today.

ALMOND VARIETIES AND FORMS

Almonds come in many different marketing types, typically California, Carmel, Peerless, Mission and Nonpareil (Figure 1). The flavor profiles of these almond varieties are very similar when they are raw. Upon roasting, no significant flavor differences can be distinguished without trained sensory panels.

Almonds, of course, exist in many different forms, all of which may be used in confections (Figure 2). As far as addressing the nut pastes that can be produced from almonds let’s focus specifically on almond paste, marzipan (a sweetened almond paste) and almond butter.

WORKING DEFINITIONS

There are many different types of pastes that are produced from almonds, but there are only a few that have significant economic importance. Those are almond pastes, marzipan and almond butter.

The difference between almond paste and almond butter is moisture content (Figure 3). Almond pastes are produced from

Since 1996 Cunningham has been the director of R&D at Blue Diamond Growers. Prior to this appointment he worked at Blue Diamond at the almond research center since 1992 after his experience at Frito-Lay where he had worked since 1978.



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