

Tired of holiday fruitcake? New gourmet fruit pastes add new twist to tradition

We already know we're going to pay for all the eating we'll do over the holidays.

Between the fatty foods, the sweet treats and all the processed food that invariably winds up on our tables, it makes us want to make our New Year's Resolutions before we even pick up our plates.

But Jan Meyer doesn't believe it has to be that way.

"The holidays are a time to indulge and enjoy ourselves, but that doesn't mean we have to subject ourselves to fat-packed processed foods that contain chemicals and preservatives," said Meyer, CEO of New Zealand's Rutherford & Meyer, maker of gourmet fruit products (www.rutherfordandmeyer.com.) "That's why we believe in approaching gourmet sweet treats and cooking with fruit in a different way that's more fun, affordable and natural."

Meyer's company has created a whole new category of gourmet fruit product called "fruit paste," which is essentially a combination of all natural fruits

and sugar that can be sliced like a wedge of cheese. The fruit pastes are wheat free, gluten free, dairy free and contain no added colors or preservatives, which is important to Meyer.

"One of the hassles of the holidays is being able to put something on the table that everyone can enjoy," she said. "With all those who are either lactose intolerant or have allergies to gluten or nuts, putting together a holiday platter can be an exercise in bland. Our fruit pastes are all natural and don't contain dairy, nuts, wheat or gluten, so you can put them on the serving tray with a clear conscience, knowing that everyone will be able to enjoy them."

What's more, according to Meyer, is that they are as fun to serve with cheese as they are to use when cooking.

"Fruit pastes are the perfect accompaniment to cheese, because their flavors are a perfect foil for most cheeses, and they are easy to serve," she said. "They make a wonderful addition to any cheeseboard or antipasto selection. They

can also be used in cooking and make a flavorful addition in many recipes."

She added that the paste doesn't need to be refrigerated and can last up to 12 months, and that they are an affordable addition to a gourmet gift basket with price tags that average between \$5 and \$6, depending on the product. Williams & Sonoma selected these new imports for their Web site catalogue, and upscale grocery stores are beginning to carry the products, as well.

"American's are beginning to understand cheese accompaniments better, rather than being scared of them," said Meyer. "Actually fruit paste is something that originated in Europe and is a product that people have eaten with cheese for many years. What we have started is the wide array of fruit pastes. We had initially wanted to expand into specialty stores, but we discovered that more traditional grocers were interested in providing their customers something new and different, so we're expanding a little faster than planned. That's a testimony to American sophistication."

