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# women's Adventure

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# Brave New Butters

Try these less orthodox butters as alternatives to the classic sandwich spread.

BY MATTHEW G. KADEY MSc., RD

**O**ne of the reasons I'm nervous about traveling overseas for an exotic bike ride or tramp through the rain-forest is that it's often hard to track down a jar of peanut butter. Many other countries don't get our infatuation with grinding up the legume and slathering it on toast. But then again, who can explain Vegemite?

Meanwhile, this American peanut staple has seemingly held a monopoly on the nut-butter market. Peanut butter holds our palates hostage to its creamy deliciousness—to the tune of 5.5 pounds consumed per year, according to the USDA. But what if the recent salmonella outbreak makes you squeamish?

Or if the rising tide of peanut allergies means Skippy is shunned at your kids' school? Maybe you're just jonesing for a greater spread of options to accompany Mom's homemade jam.

There are many reasons to explore the benefits of other nuts and seeds and their great taste when pureed are driving increased sales of peanut butter alternatives," says Katie Kearney, president of Naturally Nutty Foods in Michigan." Luckily, nutty food manufacturers are grinding up all sorts of tasty and very nutritious alternatives, such as these five that are worthy of sticking to the roof of your mouth.

## 1 Almond Butter

**Special health properties:** With a slightly crunchier consistency, almond butter bests its peanut-based brethren for the antioxidant vitamin E; bone-building minerals calcium, magnesium, and phosphorus; and monounsaturated fat, a heart-healthy fat that keeps cholesterol levels in check. The calorie count, as with all nut and seed spreads, is significant at about 100 per tablespoon. Ergo, spread thin.

**On the go:** For a nutrient-packed snack on the trail, spread 1 tablespoon of almond butter onto a small whole-grain tortilla and top with sliced bananas and dried blueberries or cherries. Almond butter's hearty, sweet taste makes it a perfect dip for sliced apples and raw veggies.

**Specialty types:**  
Naturally Nutty Vanilla Almond Butter \$10, 1.5 oz; [www.naturallynutty.com](http://www.naturallynutty.com)

Earth Balance Creamy Almond Butter \$10, 16 oz;  
[www.earthbalancenatural.com](http://www.earthbalancenatural.com)

## 2 Walnut butter

**Special health properties:** The lumpy walnut, whole or smooched, is one of nature's most nutrient-dense foods, with no other nut even coming close to its wallop of omega-3 fatty acids. Grinding up walnuts produces a slightly bitter puree thanks to the naturally occurring tannins, but scientists are attributing all sorts of health perks to this nut's omega-3 boost, including reduced risk of heart attack, certain cancers, and cognitive decline.

**On the go:** Substitute for peanut butter to make walnut butter cookies. Try a dollop on your morning oatmeal, and add walnut butter to smoothies, pureed soups, and sauces (think stir-fry) to up the nutrient content and add rich, crowd-pleasing flavor.

**Specialty types:**  
Artisana Raw Organic Walnut Butter \$11, 8 oz; [www.premierorganics.com](http://www.premierorganics.com)

Futters Just Walnut \$14, 16 oz;  
[www.futtersnutbutters.com](http://www.futtersnutbutters.com)

## 3 Hempseed butter

**Special health properties:** Verdant hempseed butter is packed with more iron and protein than other nut butters and offers a healthy dose of essential omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Its earthy flavor has nutty undertones and, because it's a hardy—ahem—weed, hemp grown for food production is usually pesticide free. Almost hazardously runny, hempseed butter needs a good mixing and should be stored in the fridge.

**On the go:** Hemp butter marries well with pure maple syrup, slathered onto whole-grain crackers, grainy breads, muffins, and waffles. It's a great addition to homemade energy bars and protein shakes, but it's good by the spoonful, too.

**Specialty types:**  
Manitoba Harvest Organic Hemp Seed Butter \$11, 10 oz;  
[www.manitobaharvest.com](http://www.manitobaharvest.com)

Wilderness Poets 100% Pure Hempspread \$14, 8 oz;  
[www.wildernesspoets.com](http://www.wildernesspoets.com)



#### 4 Cashew butter

Cashew lovers (who isn't one?) will enjoy the buttery, indulgent taste, while health nuts are sure to appreciate that this über-spread is brimming with heart-healthy monounsaturated fat, magnesium, and copper. Copper is necessary for proper iron metabolism and collagen synthesis, so this nut spread provides an added boost for bone and skin health.

**In the kitchen:** Add velvety cashew butter to curries and satay sauces or liven up plain-Jane salads by mixing equal amounts of cashew butter, olive oil, balsamic vinegar, and honey and drizzling on top of greens.

##### Spread these:

MaraNatha Roasted Cashew Butter \$11, 16 oz; [www.maranathanutbutters.com](http://www.maranathanutbutters.com)

Once Again Cashew Butter \$11, 16 oz; [www.onceagainnutbutter.com](http://www.onceagainnutbutter.com)

#### 5 Hazelnut butter

Long familiar to globe-trotters, the chocolate-infused Italian spread Nutella is the most common form of hazelnut-based spread. But, almost-sinful straight-up hazelnut butter is so rich and smoky once the lid is popped, you'll struggle to keep that wandering index finger (or piece of dark chocolate) at bay. Along with an excellent 8-to-1 ratio of unsaturated (good) to saturated (lousy) fat, hazelnuts are jammed with copper, vitamin E, and B vitamins like folate and magnesium, the latter of which is an oft-overlooked mineral linked to strengthening immunity and regulating blood sugar and nerve function.

**In the kitchen:** Whisk hazelnut butter with tamari or soy sauce, lime juice, honey, and red pepper flakes. Pour over shredded carrots and thinly sliced red pepper for a delish side dish. We did mention the dark chocolate thing, right?

##### Spread these:

Kettle Unsalted Hazelnut Butter \$8, 11.5 oz; [www.kettlefoods.com](http://www.kettlefoods.com)

Futters Just Hazelnut Butter \$15, 16 oz; [www.futtersnutbutters.com](http://www.futtersnutbutters.com)

# Craft Your Own

More intimidating to make than jam, nut butters aren't a staple of most home gourmands. But we tapped Chef Hinnerk von Bergen, associate professor at the Culinary Institute of America, for recipes for his favorite homemade spreads and ways to jazz things up:

#### Ingredients

2 to 3 cups unsalted nuts or seeds  
2 tablespoons peanut, canola, or grapeseed oil  
½ teaspoon salt or to taste

In a food processor, combine nuts or seeds with salt. Begin blending, drizzling oil in from the top. Process 2 to 3 minutes, adding oil slowly to achieve desired consistency and scraping down sides as necessary. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to two months.

**For a chunkier butter:** Use less oil and fold finely chopped nuts into the finished butter.

**For a deeper flavor:** Roast the nuts or seeds in the oven at 350 degrees for 5 to 10 minutes before blending.

**For a healthier spread:** Use cashews and substitute half with cooked fava beans.

**For tang:** Blend nuts with ginger powder and fresh lemon zest or with finely chopped lemongrass.

**For dessert:** Grind nuts with brown sugar, honey, cocoa powder, and/or vanilla extract. Try a pinch of cayenne to turn up the heat—great with hazelnuts or fresh fruit.

**For something fruity:** Process seeds or nuts with apple butter and cinnamon.