

10 TOP

Canadian food & beverage companies to watch

Each year the Canadian food scene welcomes a crop of new companies, many of them started up by entrepreneurs with no food, let alone food processing, experience. But they do share a passion for food and for the idea that prompted them to take the risk and start up a company. Each one has a fascinating story, making them this year's food and beverage companies to watch.

By Deanna Rosolen

Hidden Garden Foods Ltd.

Catherine Anderson of Burnaby, B.C., launched Hidden Garden Foods Ltd. in 2013. The company makes gluten-free cookies with hidden vegetables. www.hiddengardenfoods.com



Q: Where did the idea for your company and products come from?

Catherine Anderson: I was a busy mom with two little girls who refused to eat vegetables. I was always trying to creatively hide vegetables in other food, and it struck me that there weren't really any convenience foods on the market

that would help with hiding vegetables for me. I decided to unleash my entrepreneurial spirit and try to come up with something on my own.

Q: Any challenges getting started? I didn't have a background in the food industry so it was a steep learning curve to start.

Q: What makes your products unique? Our Hidden Garden cookies have a half serving of vegetables in them. They're also gluten free, all natural, and still taste like delicious little cookies.

Q: Future plans? We are excited to have launched in the U.S. in March. We also have a lot of product innovation in the pipeline right now with new products coming out later on this year.

Q: Highlights from the past year? We partnered up with some fantastic new Canadian distributors, which have really helped to take the business to a new level.

Q: What has consumer response been like? Overwhelmingly positive. It has been really fulfilling to watch the business grow.



Piccola Cucina

Winnipeg, Man.-based mother/daughter team Anita and Pina Romolo launched Piccola Cucina in 2009. The company makes gourmet, artisan Italian treats. www.piccolacucina.ca

Q: Where did the idea for your company and products come from? **Pina Romolo:** The idea initially came after we were laid off from our jobs and thought about starting a small biscotti baking business. The business and products have since evolved into a line of Italian macarons and almond-based pie shells.

Q: Any challenges getting started? Locating a small commercial kitchen, budgeting, scaling up and learning how best to manufacture our products with maximum efficiencies, as well as how to package our product to meet labelling requirements.

Q: What makes your product unique? It all began with the traditional amaretti cookies, an Italian-style macaroon made with almonds, egg whites, sugar and natural flavouring. A couple of years ago, we developed a sweet almond pie shell using the same simple macaroon ingredients. This high flavour, high texture shell is perfect for sweet fillings from custards, to fruit pies, to cheesecakes. They're essentially ideal for any traditional filling with an elevated flavour profile. Over the last six months we developed an unsweetened, vegan version of the almond pie shell in response to customer feedback. It's the perfect vessel for savoury dishes like deep-dish pizza, meat pies and quiches.

Q: Future plans? We plan to expand into Ontario and Alberta through a distributor, and to fully launch in the U.S.