

Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Episode 82: Holiday Shopping List 2024

[Light upbeat holiday music begins.]

Tara: It's the holiday season at Trader Joe's. You ready?

Matt: Yes. I love the holidays at Trader Joe's.

Tara: No, no. I mean, are you ready for the totals?

Matt: Roll the tote board.

[Tote board rapidly scrolling.]

Tara: Show us the numbers.

[Announcement music, crowd applause.]

Tara: Wow, look at that.

[Upbeat holiday music.]

Matt: Unbelievable. There are about 475 holiday products at Trader Joe's. You sure?

Tara: I counted. Some are totally new. Some are returning favorites.

Matt: All right then, let's go Inside Trader Joe Ho Ho Ho's.

[Theme music begins accompanied with sleigh bells and two bells at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]

Tara: I am Tara Miller, director of words and phrases and clauses.

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the culture and innovation guy at Trader Joe's. Now with hundreds of holiday products to talk about this could be a really long podcast.

Tara: But for our Holiday Shopping List Episode, we are going to focus on just 12.

Matt: You sure?

Tara: I counted.

Matt: Of course, we would recommend that you peruse all the holiday products at your Trader Joe's. I mean, they're all favorites of ours, but we might not hold attention past about a dozen.

Tara: Every product we're going to talk about has been released. It's available in your neighborhood Trader Joe's, right now.

[Theme music ends. Light upbeat holiday music begins.]

Tara: Okay, let's get to our list.

Matt: I love to start.

Tara: Okay, you can start.

Matt: It doesn't matter who, but I love to start.

Tara: Oh, I got it. Stuffed olives.

Matt: I love to start.

Tara: This is going to be one of those episodes.

Matt: We have two kinds of stuffed olives. First up, returning customer favorite, Blue Cheese Stuffed Chalkidiki Olives.

Tara: Are you sure that's how you pronounce that?

Matt: No, but I'm going to say it with certainty. Chalkidiki.

Tara: I will say that we consulted a number of online pronunciation guides. Some of them were absolutely Greek, not a single one of them agreed with another.

Matt: And while our pronunciations might be Greek to us, these olives are decidedly of Greek origin, grown in, packed in, sent from Greece to us.

Tara: And stuffed with tangy, creamy, blue cheese.

Matt: Sometimes when I mention these to people, I get almost a puzzled response like, "Why?"

Tara: Because it's delicious?

Matt: And you just have to try it. If you think about what I would describe as the piquant flavor of blue cheese, and it's certainly salty, and classic olives are also certainly salty, that combo, this is the best way to whet your appetite to get going at a gathering.

Tara: They're packed in oil. They're not packed in a brine. I have been known to float one or two of these in a martini, and I've heard people say, "You really want to do that with the brined ones and not the oil packed ones." I kind of disagree. I will dab the oil off with a towel a little bit, but the flavor of the blue cheese and the actual flavor of the olive, and not just the brine, it goes really well with a martini.

Matt: And I love the meatiness, this variety of olive, Chalkidiki, they're larger, they're still green, and they have amazing, almost crispness to their texture, and you bite through that olive onto the creamy cheese. This is really a fun thing to eat.

[Music transition.]

Tara: And it's so fun to eat we have developed an additional option using the same olive, but with a different stuffing. This year we have Lemon Stuffed Chalkidiki Olives, and it's not like pieces of lemon. It's pieces of lemon peel inside the olive. It might sound really strange. It is one of the most delicious olives I've ever eaten in my life.

Matt: This to me flavor-wise is absolutely Mediterranean. The brightness of the lemon peel comes through with that saltiness. Anyone who has tasted this olive has been blown away by it because it's so simple, but it's surprising.

Tara: These are brined, so this is not packed in olive oil. This is packed in a brine, so you do get that sort of briny saltiness and the tartness of that lemon peel. Such a great flavor combination. I love these. I can't wait to have these on a holiday table this year. Great gift actually, if you're making a foodie gift basket. I haven't seen these in other stores, at least not stores where I would regularly shop. That's really going to make a statement, I think.

Matt: If life gives you lemons, put them into olives and give them away as gifts.

Tara: Absolutely.

Matt: On my notes, it says, "Other product-related shtick," so that's what I'm working on.

Tara: (laughs) We always have product-related shtick.

[Music transition.]

Tara: Maybe next, Matt, we should go to what we are calling the Elevated Cracker assortment. They're not like the same old, same old grocery store kind of crackers. These crackers taste like they've been handcrafted by master bakers.

Matt: They're from the UK, from a company that has been around, from what I understand, more than a hundred years...

Tara: Wow.

Matt: ...making things like crackers, things like cookies. You might be wondering why are these things elevated?

Tara: I'm afraid to ask.

Matt: Well, I'm glad you did. They're elevated because they're quite heavenly.

[Choir of angels.]

Tara: Was that a choir of angels?

Matt: Yes. And they love these crackers.

Tara: Not just for cheese, but for any kind of canapes you might want to make for a holiday hors d'oeuvres table. These are really elegant crackers.

Matt: These are things to be savored, things to be considered.

[Opening box of crackers.]

Tara: So, inside the box of crackers are three sleeves of crackers: a Plum and Date Toast, a Buttermilk Cracker, and a Lemon and Black Pepper Cracker.

[Opening a sleeve of crackers.]

Matt: I mean, who needs the unboxing video when you can just listen?

Tara: So, Plum and Date Toast.

Matt: Little slices of bread.

Tara: Yeah, that's just true. There are little slices of bread baked into crackers.

Matt: (sniffing) Oh, they smell positively plummy. That is such a nice aroma.

Tara: Positively plummy. It's a very British description for British crackers. Right?

Matt: Yeah.

[Crunching.]

Tara: It's not flimsy. It's not even to denigrate a thinner cracker, but I really like that.

Matt: These are serious.

Tara: That's going to stand up to anything you might want to put on it. Okay, here's the Buttermilk Cracker. I could eat that whole sleeve of Buttermilk Crackers right now.

Matt: If scones with clotted cream were to be transformed into a cracker, it would be this thing. That is really good on its own.

Tara: You're very good at describing the flavors. Okay, so this last one in the box is the Lemon and Black Pepper Cracker. And man, with a piece of just really nice cheddar cheese on top that would be fantastic, even with nothing on top that's fantastic.

Matt: What a great way to ruin your dinner with the appetizers.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: You'll eat all these crackers. They're really good.

Tara: Mmm.

Matt: These are so fun. This is fancy time.

Tara: You want to go to sweet? Let's go to sweet thing.

[Music transition to light holiday music.]

Matt: Hey, you know who loves candy?

Tara: Other than you and me?

Matt: Iggy Pop. He just can't let it go.

Tara: Oh, Bow Wow Wow, they want candy too. Matt, our references are terrible. We do have great candy though.

Matt: We have lots of great candy for the holidays, including something new: Chaos Gummies.

Tara: I am all about the chaos, Matt.

[Opening a bag of candy, loud crinkling.]

Tara: This is a big bag of Chaos Gummies. Can anyone hear what I'm saying?

Matt: This is the biggest bag of gummies I think we've ever had. It's 20 ounces, more than a pound of gummies. Sometimes in the larger candy marketplace you see mixes and assortments in different shapes, and we wanted a gummy candy experience that replicated opening presents and all the fun chaos that comes with it. This might be the only gummy collection that has both gummy sneakers and gummy mustaches.

Tara: As you'll notice on the bag, it is a festive chaos of gummies.

Matt: So it's not just any kind of chaos. This is festive.

[Bag crinkling.]

Tara: When you open a fresh bag of gummies, those smell delicious.

Matt: (sniffs) That smells like France. And that's actually where these gummies come to us, from France, and we're going to start with the classic little, tiny gummy bears.

Tara: Yup.

Matt: And after that, all bets are off.

Tara: Okay.

Matt: We have an assortment of, these look like bottles in different shapes.

Tara: So much fun stuff in here. Seriously.

Matt: Sneakers.

Tara: A present, an ornament from a tree, like a stocking kind of situation or no, those are like holly berry leaves.

Matt: S-T-O-C-K-I-N-G.

Tara: Right? There's a little snowman. Super cute. I'm holding it up like anyone can see it. The sneakers. So on the bottom of the sneakers is the white part, like a foamy gummy situation.

Matt: Yeah, and let's break it down.

[Retail jargon alert sounder.]

Matt: Let's have a little jargon alert.

[Music transition.]

Matt: Foamy gummies in gummy candy making parlance. That's almost like a whipped gummy texture. Generally white, opaque and softer, foamier textured than the regular part of the gummy. And in this situation, as the sole of the sneaker, perfectly executed.

Tara: They're all different flavors. So every gummy has a different flavor and the ones that are shaped like bottles are cola flavored.

Matt: Mm-hmm.

Tara: It's very satisfying. The mustaches are the best though. You know that you're going to buy these gummies and you're going to do what I'm doing right now. You're going to put the mustache under...

Matt: And I didn't even recognize you.

Tara: (laughs)

Matt: Perfect disguise.

Tara: (laughs) If you're a gummy fan, get these quickly because they're not going to be around too much longer.

Matt: If you know a gummy fan, you should get this for them. Trader Joe's Festive Chaos Gummies.

Tara: Super cute, love them. But what's next?

[Music transition to light holiday music.]

Matt: You can't think about the winter holiday season and not think about Jingle Jangle. I believe we bought more Jingle Jangle than we've ever bought, and we just couldn't leave that alone. We went back for a smaller, different, strangely similar thing.

Tara: This year we have what we're calling Jingly Jangly, and it is all the components of Jingle Jangle, but in a pocket or purse-sized bag, you might want to eat this on the way home, or you might want to stuff this into a stocking, or you might want this to be a gift from your kid to all the kids in their class. It's little, it's only just under three ounces of Jingle Jangle, but it's all the components that are in that big tin.

Matt: What's fun about this is it's not exactly the same thing in a small pocket or purse-sized pouch. It has a special component.

Tara: Wait.

Matt: That's right.

Tara: What?

Matt: A dark chocolate cookie pretzel bark. Now it's dark chocolate base with bits of Joe-Joe Cookies and pretzels. It's a twist on that original Jingle Jangle. But we couldn't fit everything into this bag, so we had to blend a few things into a new thing. Dark Chocolate Cookie Pretzel Bark.

Tara: That's kind of genius.

Matt: I think that could become a standalone product. So we'll see.

Tara: And as we said, there are so many sweets and candies at Trader Joe's this time of year. We're just kind of giving you highlights of a couple that we're excited about.

Matt: Absolutely, and I think Jingly Jangly, I think so many people will say, "Oh, what a great stocking stuffer." Absolutely. It will be. I think it'd be great to just have a bunch of bags of Jingly Jangly at the ready. So when Dennis from across the street, you're chatting him up about the mail carrier and when the cards are going to arrive, just give him a bag of Jingly Jangly.

Tara: You're a good neighbor.

Matt: Well, Dennis is a good neighbor.

Tara: Okay. You know who else loves Jingle Jangle?

Matt: No.

Tara: Dogs.

[Dog barking twice. Music transition.]

Matt: Wait a minute. Dogs can't have regular chocolate.

[Dog whimpering.]

Tara: Heck no. But we have Jingle Jangle for dogs now.

[Happy dog bark.]

Tara: It's different.

[Shaking tin container.]

Tara: They can have Jingle Jangle for dogs. No chocolate. It's in a tin, just like the traditional Jingle Jangle, but it's very specifically for dogs.

Matt: We must just love our dogs.

Tara: Of course we do. There's pretzel shapes and star shapes. Oh, and there's a bone shape.

Matt: Of course.

Tara: So it's really just an assortment of doggy treats in a Jingle Jangly kind of tin. The treats are peanut butter and/or carob flavors. So it's kind of approximating chocolate, but in a way that's safe for dogs.

Matt: Appropriate for dogs. Good.

Tara: And they are enrobed in a peanut butter coating. I kind of want to try one. You want to try one?

Matt: (inhales deeply) Okay.

Tara: Oh, you're usually right on trying the dog treats.

Matt: I know, but I've had so many Chaos Gummies, but okay, let's wash it down with a treat for Fido.

Tara: I'm having a peanut butter enrobed Jingle Jangle pretzel for dogs.

Matt: I'm having a star.

Tara: That is absolutely delicious.

Matt: Oh, you just took a bite. I ate the whole thing.

Tara: Oh, my dogs are literally going to flip.

Matt: If I'm honest in my assessment it would taste like something you find under a sofa cushion. Not in a bad way.

Tara: But if you're dog, that's awesome.

Matt: Exactly.

Tara: Okay. Jingle Jangle for dogs.

Matt: I could use a drink of water.

Tara: (laughs) Sure. Let me get you a bowl.

[Music transition.]

Tara: Next on our holiday shopping list. Are you ready for some cookies?

[Crowd cheering at a football game.]

Matt: Not just on Monday night football night. I mean, I'm always ready for cookies, but looking at these, I don't know whether I should eat them or give them away as gifts.

Tara: Both.

Matt: These are Trader Joe's German Iced Gingerbread Soft Spiced Cookies. What a mouthful, right? But we had to describe exactly what you're getting because the thing itself is so beautiful, you might not realize it's actually edible. It looks like a piece of tile almost, which is the weirdest way to say what a great looking cookie. It's iced. It has a stamped-in relief design. It's beautiful and it's so classic. It is texturally a contrast between crunchy, icing sugar and soft gingerbread baked just enough. I love these. And if you're looking for that kind of old-world gingerbread treat, look no further.

Tara: Yeah. This is the cookie that our Product Developer Arlene was most excited about coming for the holidays. And seeing the finished packaging and tasting the finished cookie, totally understand why she was excited. In each little box of cookies, there are two of these really delicious gingerbread cookie tiles.

[Music transition.]

Matt: If you've ever seen, you're out hunting for antiques and you see those rolling pins that have all kinds of shapes carved into them, and you wonder what on earth does anyone do with it? You make a cookie that might look like this, beautiful, stamped impressions and those

impressions are filled with that icing sugar. And then just a great classic flavor. I'm really, if you can't tell, like this cookie.

Tara: These holiday products, we start working on them so long ago, and then when they finally make it into the stores, it's so exciting to see the results of all of that time and effort that's gone into making them appear. Super exciting. Speaking of old-world treat kind of cookies, the same supplier who is producing the Elevated Cracker Collection, we are also working with them on what we've called the British Shortbread Cookie Collection. And wow, these are absolutely delicious little cookies.

Matt: I mean, we were blown away by this team's skill. These are too nice to not share with customers. So another very giftable box of cookies.

Tara: In each box there are three trays, and each tray is filled with a single variety of cookie.

Matt: Yup.

Tara: One cookie is coffee flavored. It has ground coffee in it. You can see it. One is English toffee and nuts in the cookie, and the other is cocoa. So it's a dark brown colored cookie, but these are classic English shortbread cookies.

Matt: It's all about the butter.

Tara: It is all about the butter.

Matt: And these are so tasty. They have that incredible crisp shortbread crumb that is light and a little dense at the same time. Sounds like your host...

Tara: (laughs)

Matt: ...but if you're having a holiday tea and you want to set out some little treats, perfectly finger sized.

Tara: Or if you're doing a sort of a holiday gathering with a dessert display, right? If you have a...

Matt: A dessert display?

Tara: Don't you always do that?

Matt: I need to now start.

[Opening tray, crinkling.]

Tara: Coffee first. Right? Those are really good. The coffee is not overpowering.

Matt: It's nice because the coffee has no bitterness.

Tara: Mm-mm.

Matt: Which I don't mind in a cup of coffee. And in a sweet treat it's nice to have a smoother, roasty coffee flavor.

Tara: Okay. This is the English toffee and nut. The nuts in question here are hazelnuts. (crunching) Oh, wow.

Matt: Nice. So I'm imagining being in the big city shopping for the holidays. You're bundled up and you walk past one of those candied nut roaster guys on the street corner. This is the shortbread cookie version of that experience. That was good.

Tara: Those are delish. Okay. And here's the cocoa.

Matt: Okay. Cocoa.

Tara: They smell super cocoa-y and not overly chocolatey. That might be one of my favorite cocoa cookies, ever. Rich flavors of cocoa and butter, but without being really sweet and without being bitter. Okay, I'm all in on...

Matt: Feeling pressed for time and can't get to the UK this time of year. Don't worry. Trader Joe's British Shortbread Cookie Collection is here to save that day.

Tara: Wow.

Matt: Only 37 things to go.

Tara: (laughs)

[Music ends.]

Tara: Oh, Matt, we have a fun new appetizer on our holiday shopping list.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: The Mini Mushroom Tartlets.

Matt: That sounds like a musical review.

Tara: I would go to that musical review.

Matt: And I will eat these tartlets.

Tara: To me, they are umami in a bite.

Matt: Yes. Little mushroom bites. These go above and beyond.

Tara: They're made with white mushrooms and shiitake mushrooms. They have Parmesan cheese and ricotta cheese. They have garlic, they have shallots. They're so filled

with flavor, great texture, and the little pastry shell that they're sitting in. Any dinner party, any passed hors d'oeuvres you might be thinking about.

Matt: I happened to recently be at a very fancy event. It was a nuptial matter and at the reception...

Tara: You mean a wedding?

Matt: That too.

Tara: Okay.

Matt: And they had tray-passed hors d'oeuvres. It was that level of fun and they had little mushroom tarts there. And these are, dare I say, as good as what I tasted at this really wonderful event. And so this is easy, easy, easy.

Tara: Really easy to make, too. You pop them in your oven, that's it. You can pop them in your air fryer. We have instructions for both of those preparations on the package. Every box has 12, so if you're having a big party, buy a few boxes. If you're just having a few friends over one box might be enough.

Matt: I love that we're on savory. Anything else?

Tara: So many more things. But in addition to appetizers, we have some really interesting savory side dish options happening this year. Another one that's brand new is what we're calling Trader Joe's Cheesy Creamy Greens and Veggies. This is a combination of Brussel sprouts, onion, spinach, and kale in a rich cheese sauce.

Matt: How are you thinking of making this? Is this like a casserole situation?

Tara: So you can microwave this, you can stove top cook it. I would recommend stove top cooking it. I would imagine, Matt, that you could casserole this. We don't have instructions on the package for doing a casserole and baking it, but I bet it would work really well.

Matt: It's something that you don't need to give the casserole treatment, but I suppose you could, our Holiday Hash.

Tara: Holiday Vegetable Hash. So to be clear, the Cheesy Creamy Greens and Veggies that's in the freezer at Trader Joe's, that is a frozen product at Trader Joe's. The Holiday Vegetable Hash is a refrigerated product. It's a hash of seasonally meaningful veggies: butternut squash, sweet potato, red onion, celery, parsley, sage and rosemary.

Matt: At this time of year, time is the critical factor, the secret ingredient to everything that we have going on, and if you're going to make a hash of something, you're going to really chop it up and this saves you so much time.

Tara: Even the seasoning part of it is kind of done. I have used this sort of as a meat-free replacement for a traditional corned beef hash and sauteed it and gotten it nice and crispy on the bottom and then served eggs over it.

Matt: I like this in stuffing. Cook it in a pan, little crispy, nice and brown, and then fold it into stuffing. This is a fun way to be gourmet and spend time on something else.

Tara: Okay, Matt, the meal is over now.

[Music transition.]

Matt: That's it?

Tara: Right? What happens at the end of a meal?

Matt: Dishes.

Tara: Before dishes.

Matt: Usually some nice chit-chat.

Tara: That sweet treat at the end of a meal. I'm going to spoon-feed it to you here because it is ice cream.

Matt: Oh!

Tara: We have English Toffee Ice Cream this year.

Matt: I had forgotten about this. I'm glad to be reminded of this ice cream.

Tara: Brand new, this year. Would you like a spoon?

Matt: This was the result of more than one tasting exercise.

Tara: Yes, it was.

Matt: We had to taste through tough as it was, multiple iterations of this ice cream because it wasn't just plain ice cream with some candy shoved in there.

Tara: No, no, no. It is a brown butter ice cream.

Matt: Which on its own might be a wonderful thing.

Tara: And it has chocolatey covered toffee pieces and almonds. It's really, really, really good. It has a really interesting, almost caramelized flavor, just like a brown butter. If you shop with us, you understand that our freezer space is very limited because our stores are relatively small. There are a lot of ice cream flavors we want to offer to our customers, and we cannot. We just don't have the space to offer all of those flavors every day. So we rotate flavors in and out on a limited basis. Sometimes they're really seasonally targeted flavors like this. Toffee is a real holiday thing at Trader Joe's, you have no words.

Matt: It's true. That is really nice. The ice cream base itself, that brown butter ice cream, that's a great flavor. And then the texture of the toffee pieces. They are crunchy without being too hard.

Tara: Mm-hmmm.

Matt: Nicely done ice cream people.

Tara: Nicely done ice cream people, indeed.

[Music ends. Transition to close.]

Tara: That was a really good product on which to end our holiday shopping list, Matt.

[Closing music ends.]

Tara: Damn that ice cream is good.

Matt: That's really nice.

Tara: That's really, really good.

Matt: I'm in a self-induced holiday product coma. I feel like I should take a walk.

Tara: There are more episodes of *Inside Trader Joe's* coming your way. And to make sure you get them, hit that free subscribe or follow button.

Matt: It *is* free and worth every penny.

Tara: Until next time, thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.

Tara: Oh, and Happy Holidays.

Matt: To you and yours.