

Glutton for gluten-free

The Kirkland Signature line aims to deliver meal options for special diets

by CHRISTINA GUERRERO

COSTCO CONNECTION

Kirkland Signature Organic Hemp Hearts (Item 1388341) and Kirkland Signature Supreme Cauliflower Crust Pizza (Item 1524380) can be found in Costco warehouses. Groceries are available for delivery through Costco [Grocery](#) at Costco.com.





Kirkland Signature Supreme Cauliflower Crust Pizza © ARIGATO / SHUTTERSTOCK

From research to supplier comparison to sourcing, many factors go into the creation of a Kirkland Signature™ item. Surprisingly, food trends sometimes inspire a new product for the private-label line. Hemp hearts and cauliflower crust pizza are two new gluten-free Kirkland Signature items in Costco warehouses this year.

We heart hemp

Known for their health benefits, hemp hearts were a food trend that took off in Canadian Costco warehouses first, but in the last few years they have become very popular in the U.S.

Hemp seeds can be eaten raw or cooked. Use them as a substitute for bread crumbs when crusting fish and chicken. Add them to salads, smoothies, granola, oatmeal, cereal, yogurt, cakes, pasta, pancakes, baked goods, chili, soups or stews.

"They do have a lot of uses," says Elisabeth Zeitler, Costco corporate foods assistant buyer. "You only need 30 grams of hemp seeds to get a full serving, so it's not like you need to eat a lot of it."

After seeing the success of conventional hemp hearts in Canada and organic hemp hearts in the U.S., the buyers decided to create gluten-free Kirkland Signature Organic Hemp Hearts. "The biggest driving factor was that, within grains, hemp hearts were the fastest-growing item," Zeitler says.

This not only converted the hemp hearts in Canada warehouses to an organic product, but also created a 40% savings for members compared to the previous brand. This also allowed Costco to expand the supply chain with two suppliers from different countries: Canada and Lithuania.

The Finola variety of hemp has a very natural, nutty, earthy flavor. Each crop goes through more than 30 different tests during the production process to ensure members are receiving a high-quality product. Since hemp plants have multiple uses, when the hemp seeds are processed the leftover parts of the plant can be used in the production of biofuel or as animal feed, so there's no waste.

Cauliflower pizza crust

With the keto craze and other low-carb or gluten-free diets rising in popularity, carb substitutes, such as cauliflower, moved up the list of member wants. This August, the Kirkland Signature Supreme Cauliflower Crust Pizza made its debut. "The Kirkland Signature buying team is paying attention to current trends, and we're trying to make sure that we're developing items that are in line with those trends," says Michael Adams, food and sundry buyer for frozen goods.

After seeing the popularity of the frozen Milton's Roasted Vegetable Cauliflower Crust Pizza, and with the Food Court removing the combo pizza and the Service Deli eliminating the take-and-bake options, the buying team knew a frozen supreme pizza was something they wanted to pursue. The preferred option was a gluten-free, cold-pressed cauliflower crust.

"Cold-pressed is a high-water-content dough that is pressed into a pan with a little oil in the bottom and then sent through the oven," says Brittni Meyers, Costco food and sundry assistant buyer for frozen goods. "The crust's texture is crispy and light."

After the initial baking, the crust is topped with rich tomato sauce, mozzarella cheese, a combination of zesty pork pepperoni and savory seasoned sausage, a variety of roasted vegetables (red, yellow and green bell peppers, mushrooms, onions and zucchini) and Parmesan and Romano cheeses.

"Even if you're not looking for that vegetable crust, it has a really good texture and it delivers a delicious combination of flavors," Meyers says.

Pizza party

The Kirkland Signature line of frozen pizzas has evolved. The cheese pizza arrived in 2010. Due to the popularity of that item, a new flavor was created, and the Kirkland Signature Pepperoni Pizza Rising Crust was introduced in 2012. It was replaced by the current Kirkland Signature Pepperoni Pizza in 2015.

By using the same long-term supplier to make these pizzas, Kirkland Signature pizza has the same great-tasting flavor no matter how you slice it.—CG

Super seed



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Hemp hearts are a nutritionally rich food source. Here's how Kirkland Signature Organic Hemp Hearts measure up. They:

- Contain all 10 essential amino acids
- Have 10 grams of plant-based protein per serving
- Are highly digestible

- Are high in omega-3 and omega-6
- Are rich in nutrients, including magnesium, zinc, iron and folic acid
- Are cholesterol-free
- Are keto-friendly
- Are paleo-friendly
- Are allergen-free
- Are certified gluten-free