

The Washington Post

Democracy Dies in Darkness

Gross or great? Fancy butter boards soar as shortage looms

By Leanne Italie | AP

October 21, 2022 at 11:10 a.m. EDT



A cream cheese board, left, and a butter board. Butter boards, the polarizing stepchild of charcuterie, have taken TikTok to new food-craze heights. (Valerie Allen via AP) (Uncredited/Valerie Allen)

NEW YORK — Legit gross or crazy delicious?

Butter boards, the polarizing stepchild of charcuterie, have taken TikTok to new food-craze heights as some horrified safety and nutrition experts look on. And now, heading into the holidays, the boards are landing on tables as quick, inexpensive alternatives to the meat- and fancy cheese-laden OG despite a winter butter shortage projected for the U.S. that could drive up prices and make it more difficult to find in supermarkets.

“I wish they’d just go away. The idea of smearing something on a wood board with other food, sharing that with other people and having them all dip into it. It’s a bacteria heaven,” said [Laura Cipullo](#) a registered dietitian in New York City.

Justine Doiron, who creates food content as @justine-snacks on TikTok and Instagram, got the butter board party started on Sept. 15. She is credited with coining the term [in a video](#) that has her spreading it with abandon on a cutting board and topping it with, among many other things, edible flowers.

She got the idea — jazzed up butter on wood — from chef Joshua McFadden’s 2017 cookbook with Martha Holmberg, “Six Seasons: A New Way with Vegetables.”

“I think the draw is that it’s super customizable,” Doiron told The Associated Press. “You can be so creative with it, and people are always looking for something they’ve never seen before. It’s a low effort way to have some fun with food.”

Side note: She has a plant named Butter.

Doiron went viral with her busy butter board and hand swipes with thick, crusty slices of bread. Copycat videos under the #butterboard hashtag have since racked up more than 240 million views on TikTok. Searches related to the topic have reached 10 billion on the platform, with decorated mountains of butter also going strong on Instagram.

And the boards themselves have spawned sweet sister versions, vegan cousins and ice cream aunts and uncles.

Magnolia Bakery posted a video of buttercream frosting being spread artfully on a cake stand with pieces of cookie, brownies, rainbow sprinkles and other goodies for swiping. Toothpicks were involved, as opposed to all hands in. Ben & Jerry's filmed a frozen version.

Private chefs are fielding lots of requests from clients now looking for spreadables on boards. Kevin Hart's Los Angeles chef, Kai Chase, said she created several of the boards for him as a splurge.

While some eateries have been smearing butter on boards for years, Magnolia, for one, has no plans to sell boards of its own. As for the notion of promoting sugar overload, Magnolia's CEO and chief baking officer, Bobbie Lloyd, said: "We believe that moderation is the key to a sweet, balanced life."

Doiron has some butter board regrets, food handling wise, though she's reluctant to put the "yuck in anybody's yum."

"I prefer a knife. The big mistake in my video was swiping it because I only had 28 seconds. But I think just like a charcuterie board, serve it with a knife, let people serve themselves. But it's really up to personal preference," she said.

Suzie Cornell in Boca Raton, Florida, brought along a lox and cream cheese board to break the Yom Kippur fast in early October when her family got together with a small group of friends. Assembling food on a board (in her case, stone) appeals for a simple reason: "I don't cook. I mean, literally, I don't cook."

Cornell tossed out the communal swipe situation and went for cutlery because the hand-swiping grosses her out.

In Salina, Ohio, Emily Westerfield has a small catering company that specializes in boards and bites. Boards smeared with spreads and toppings are on the tongues of many clients these days.

"I'm getting requests like crazy. A friend who's hosting her book club asked for a cream cheese board since they meet in the morning," she said.

Darin Detwiler, an assistant teaching professor of food policy at Northeastern University and an expert on food industry regulation, sees the potential for pathogens everywhere when it comes to butter boards. Wood boards crack and those cracks can't adequately be cleaned, he said.

Detwiler went into his field after losing his 16-month-old son in the 1993 E.coli outbreak tied to contaminated beef at Jack in the Box restaurants. More than 700 people fell ill in four states and three other children died as well.

"Personally, I would use a plastic board, something that can be sanitized in a dishwasher," he said. "The second hidden danger is the idea of so many hands in a butter board. People think big. People don't think about doing small butter boards. They're thinking about doing these big beautiful displays. If any of those hands aren't washed, you're just inviting opportunity."

Paul Zahn, an entertaining expert in Los Angeles, has a workaround for that: "jarcuterie."

"Make individual jars or boards for guests," he said. "That way people keep their germs to themselves and you're giving them portion control."

Some decry the fatty nature of butter in general and the almighty devil, bad cholesterol. Moderation would help there, too. Less fraught spreadables are also being used, including hummus.

"It's kind of a silly trend in a way," said Lori Shemek, a nutritionist in Dallas. "I saw one comedian who said, 'Oh, butter boards. That's like butter on bread.'"

Follow Leanne Italie on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/litalie>