Hummus

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Tribe Classic. Hummus has come out of nowhere to crowd shelves with dozens of flavors. We tried the plain versions only and loved Tribe, which starts with fresh chickpea flavor, adds just the right hint of sesame tang, and ends with a good balance of cumin and garlic.

★ TASTE TEST AWARD: Athenos Original. A delicious hummus for garlic lovers, with a slightly tart, lemony finish.

Oat & Honey Granola

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Cascadian Farm Organic. Perfect granola, crunchy and sweet, with a hint of salt to balance. Not too chunky, not too bunny—just right.

★ TASTE TEST AWARDS: Whole Foods 365 Organic. Slightly puffed brown rice gives this not-too-sweet granola a nice, light crunch.

Quaker Natural. Raisins make this one sweet and cereal-like, with a slight hint of coconut.

HOW WE TASTE-TESTED
To qualify, foods had to be available in major markets nationwide. We vetted products against nutrition standards, eliminating those that contained artificial trans fats, too much salt, or artificial sugars.

We tasted almost 200 finalists "blind". The tasters did not know which brands they were sampling until after. Keep in mind that not all products are low-fat: Good nutrition agrees with good eating when high-fat items are chosen for maximum quality and used moderately.

—Cindy Hatch, Associate Editor
TASTE TEST AWARDS
THE GROCERY WINNERS

Tuna (gourmet, packed in olive oil)

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER:
Ortiz Bonite del Norte.
High-end oil-packed tuna is a whole different animal from the
ordinary variety: rich, meaty, tangy with olive oil. It's a splurge
(the winner is about $10 a pop!), but don't discount the pleasure
potential until you taste this treat. We savored Ortiz straight
from the tin, like caviar.
★ TASTE TEST AWARD: Cento.
Firm, with strong but not fishy
tuna flavor and just the right
amount of briny salt.

100% Whole-Wheat Bread

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER:
Rudi's Organic Bakery.
Coarsely ground cracked wheat adds chewy texture and grainy
flavor, and there's the slightest
hint of molasses.
★ TASTE TEST AWARD: Whole
Foods Organic. A hearty,
dense texture makes this ideal
for toast, slathered with a tart
fruit preserve (see page 173).

JULIANNA SAYS BUTTER UP!

I'm a big fan of
butter. A little goes a
long way to that
sublime flavor, so I
wouldn't think of
using any other
ingredient in my
cookies or cakes.
It's equally indis-
issible in savory
applications like
saucy. I prefer
gourmet, European-
style butter for
all my cooking
because I love the
intense, rich taste.

--Juliana Grimes,
Associate Food Editor
Salted Gourmet Butter

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Organic Valley. Cultured butter has rich, subtle flavor, aromatic hints of cheese, and is often higher in butterfat than regular butter. Organic Valley is a lovely example, with a creamy finish, a beautiful milky flavor, and rich, farm-fresh grassy notes.

★ TASTE TEST AWARDS: Lurpak. Well-rounded with a pleasantly salty zing at the finish. Chimay. A beautiful shade of buttery yellow on the knife, with buttery richness to match.
Diced, No-Salt-Added Tomatoes

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Del Monte. This brand stood out for balanced, bright tomatoey sweetness—a go-to tomato for a quick-cooking pasta sauce.

★ TASTE TEST AWARD: Whole Foods 365 Organic. A midsummer-fresh tomato taste and a nice, thick texture make this a great option for any soup, stew, or sauce that needs body.

Canola Mayonnaise

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Hellmann’s (East Coast)/Best Foods (West Coast). Hellmann’s offers creamier texture and superb spreadability. Canola-based mayo, by the way, is a heart-healthier option (lower in saturated fat than traditional mayonnaise).

★ TASTE TEST AWARD: Whole Foods 365. Light, silky texture, balanced vinegar-lemon tang, and a nice salty kick.

Reduced-Sodium Chicken Noodle Soup

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Progresso. Big chunks of white meat chicken and carrots, plus lots of rotini noodles, took Progresso to the top. The hearty broth approaches homemade, but you can be eating it in seconds instead of hours.

★ TASTE TEST AWARD: Campbell’s Select Harvest. A nice hint of rosemary and sage perk up this soup, which is built on a broth that’s rich in chicken flavor.
Margherita Pizza

*GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Tandoor Chef Naan Pizza.* Few frozen pizzas made it under our sodium threshold. Tandoor's Margherita does, and it's a novel treat, using flavorful, Indian-style naan bread as a base, finished with fresh tomato and basil-rich flavor that delighted our panel.

*TASTE TEST AWARD: Amy's Kitchen.* Topped with organic tomatoes, whole-milk mozzarella, and lots of basil, this one is a thin-crust-lover's primo pick.

Tortilla Chips (100% yellow corn)

*GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Target Archer Farms Organic.* They're corn-yellow-pretty, delectably crunchy, nicely salted, and loaded with hearty flavor. Plus, a zip-top bag closure staves off staleness (if they last long enough for a third or fourth session).

*TASTE TEST AWARD: Tostitos Natural.* Thin, almost delicate chips have a delightful crunch, true corn flavor, and modest salt. Simple and delicious from a grand total of three ingredients.
Mild Tomato Salsa

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Green Mountain Gringo. You can visually identify almost all of its ingredients (not so for some of the overzealously pureed salsas out there). The tomatoes taste like they were harvested at the peak of summertime freshness, and pasilla and jalapeño peppers provide just the right amount of lip-tingling heat.
★ TASTE TEST AWARDS: Frontier. Its smoky kick resembles the salsas you find in authentic Mexican restaurants. Organicville. The best organic brand we tasted. Lots of fresh-tasting herbs, plus a bit of sweetness from agave nectar make it a pleasantly unusual option.

Light Microwave Popcorn

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Newman's Own 94% Fat Free. This one is irresistible, serving up buckets of popcorn crunch with nothing artificial or cardboard-y about its buttery flavor.
★ TASTE TEST AWARDS: Smart Balance Light Butter. The butter-lover's better, lighter popcorn.
Act II 94% Fat Free Butter. Big, fluffy kernels with great salt balance.

Raisin Bran

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Kellogg's Raisin Bran. Many try, few compare. The old standard stands up to milk after some competitors become soggy. Best combination of bran crunch, tangy raisin flavor, and flakes with that classic pebbly texture.
★ TASTE TEST AWARD: Fiber One Raisin Bran Clusters. The fiber-seeker's raisin bran: crunchy and sweet with a whopping 11 grams of fiber per serving.
Cannellini Beans

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Progresso.
Stock up on cannellinis for salads and stews:
They offer 5g of fiber per 100-calorie serving
and lots of rustic flavor and texture. Some beans
pour from the can soggy, even gummy, but not
these. Great bean flavor with no metallic taste.
★ TASTE TEST AWARD: Goya. Perfect chewy
texture, and a good salt balance even
after rinsing.

Unsalted Everyday Butter

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER:
Target Market Pantry.
Superior creamy texture
at a great price—about $2
a pound. This is the butter
to stock up on for this
year’s holiday-baking
marathon.
★ TASTE TEST AWARD:
Borden. Light, almost
fluffy texture that incorpo-
rates easily into a recipe.
Whole Foods 365
Organic. A good basic-
butter choice if you’re
looking for organic.
Wal-Mart Great
Value. Clean, clear
butter flavor.
**Spaghetti** (whole-wheat)

*GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Gia Russo.*
With a wheaty goodness reminiscent of brown rice, this sturdy noodle begs for a hearty sauce like puttanesca or Bolognese (see page 112).

*TASTE TEST AWARDS: Racconto.*
True wheat flavor, but there’s nothing grainy about the texture. Pair with bold, chunky sauces. *Target Archer Farms.* Great for those just starting down the whole-wheat pasta path. A subtler flavor for subtler sauces—basic marinara would be perfect.

---

**Albacore Tuna** (packed in water)

*GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Whole Foods 365.* What you want from canned tuna are distinct, meaty flakes, and that’s exactly what you get here—plus clean, pure tuna taste.

*TASTE TEST AWARDS: Crown Prince Natural.* Fresh, not-too-fishy flavor and firm texture make this a great everyday option.

---

**Chicken and Apple Sausage**

*GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Lou’s Famous.* We looked far and wide for sausages with healthy salt levels (less than 200mg per ounce), and finally found Lou’s: a flavor-packed punch of pepper, sage, and sweet apple with just 185mg sodium per ounce.

*TASTE TEST AWARD: Al Fresco Sweet Apple.* As delectably juicy as the pork version, but with about half the calories and almost 80% less saturated fat.

---

**Soy Milk** (plain, light)

*GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Target Archer Farms.* Stands out for its nice, thick, creamy texture and light sweetness.

*TASTE TEST AWARD: Silk.* 30% fewer calories than regular, with a light, quenching consistency, delicate flavor, and balanced sweetness.
Plain, Nonfat Greek Yogurt

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Fage. This is the brand that started the craze, and it’s the gold-medal standard. Beautifully thick, creamy, with a strong tangy kick. You'll like every ingredient on the list; no stabilizers or thickeners.
★ TASTE TEST AWARDS: Chobani. Super-smooth with slightly less tang than our winner, making it ideal for use in recipes or for anyone who wants less tartness. Voskos Organic. So thick and luscious that it would be a great swap for full-fat sour cream.

Boil-in-Bag Brown Rice

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Uncle Ben's. We couldn’t believe how tasty this rice is—and how quickly it’s ready (about 10 minutes). Grains are fluffy and distinct, not mushy or watery, and its nutty flavor makes this so much more than a dutiful health-food choice.
★ TASTE TEST AWARD: Success. Pleasantly tender with just the right amount of al dente bite.

Lower-Sodium Soy Sauce

★ GRAND PRIZE WINNER: Kikkoman. Soy sauce is like butter: You want maximum flavor in a small amount. Kikkoman wins for its thickness and meaty flavor.
★ TASTE TEST AWARD: Target Market Pantry. Dark, strong, with an intense smoky character.

CINDY GOES GREEK

I arrived late to the trendy Greek yogurt party, but I'm making up for lost time. There's a lot of difference between products, and it's worth spending a bit more.

—Cindy Hatcher, Associate Editor

ANN BAGS IT

I use boil-in-bag brown rice for quick sides by stirring in nuts, herbs, crumbled cheese, dried fruit, diced veggies, or citrus rind.

—Ann Taylor Pittman, Food Editor