

AltMeat®

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Fruitful ENDEAVORS

Annie Ryu has built a brand around Indian jackfruit that could answer many of the plant-based sector's challenges





Conagra Brands

What's in a name?

OUR TESTERS GENERALLY ENJOYED THE TASTE AND TEXTURE OF THESE PLANT-BASED WINGS, THOUGH THEY WERE SPLIT ON WHETHER THEY ARE "TOO SPICY" AND WHETHER THEY SHOULD PROPERLY BE CALLED "WINGS"

Ever-popular chicken wings are a top bar food and appetizer across the U.S. Many label it a comfort food that they could eat forever. Gardein, famous for its expansive line of plant-based options, offers its Ultimate Plant-Based Chick'n Wings in Buffalo and BBQ varieties for those craving an alternative to the "real" thing. Let's hear what our tasters thought about the Buffalo Wings.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Our diverse tasters included several vegetarians, a vegan and others cutting back on meat consumption and/or curious about adding alternative-meat products to their repertoire. Ages ranged from 13 and up. Many use or are familiar with Gardein products.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

"I was excited to try this based on the photo. The chick'n actually looked like chicken," a female vegetarian said. She continued, "But when I opened

the bag, I was surprised at how small the pieces were. I expected them to be larger and 'meatier'."

A long-term vegetarian shared, "Gardein is a well-known plant-based brand, and I've had a ton of their products. I like that it's in a bag because it takes up less freezer space."

"The 17g of protein seemed like a bonus until I glimpsed at the calories and fat and realized that, although one portion seems a healthy choice, ingesting the whole bag might not be such a wise idea," revealed a female vegan.

Another vegetarian told us, "I've been wanting to try these for a while. I love Buffalo sauce. I like how the Gardein bags have close-ups of the 'chicken' on the package to show how realistic it looks. The 17g of protein is a big draw, too."

"There were a good amount of wings in the bag, and I liked that the sauce was separate," explained a 40-something mom.

One couple commented, "The separate prep for the sauce is a pain, and the product name makes no sense — these aren't 'wings'."

Taste Test

APPEARANCE, TASTE AND TEXTURE

“I used the air-fryer instructions and tossed them in the sauce afterwards,” a female vegetarian said. “The air fryer crisped them up. There was more sauce than needed, and it was *hot!* I love spicy food, but these were a little much for me. I dipped them in plant-based ranch, which helped cut down the heat.”

A vegan observed, “The product is appealing. The nugget looks like conventional meat and has the same texture. It was easy to squeeze a little bit of sauce out, and the color was spot on! But I was daunted by the nutrition facts, so I was sure to make only a single portion.”

“Gardein Ultimate Chick’n seems most similar to white meat chicken

in appearance and texture,” shared a vegetarian. “There were no weird rubbery parts, like some other plant-based chicken products. They have more calories than I’d like, but a significant amount of protein makes up for it.”

A vegan described, “The taste of the nugget was bland. The sauce was very spicy. A tastier nugget with a milder sauce might have worked better.”

An open-minded mom tried these with her teen sons and commented, “My mouth is on fire! We should have dunked them in the sauce instead of tossing them. My 18-year-old liked the overpowering flavor but said he could tell it’s not real chicken. We thought it tasted like processed tofu.”



A mom in her 40s told us, “I used the air fryer, and they looked crispy and smelled great. They tasted like chicken nuggets: juicy and flavorful, with the perfect crunch. They should have called them ‘Buffalo Chick’n Nuggets’ instead of ‘Wings,’ since that’s what

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PRODUCT:

Gardein Ultimate Plant-Based Chick'n Wings
– Buffalo

PRICE:

\$7.92 – 9.99/14.8 oz

NUTRITION PER SERVING:

Calories 270, Total Fat 13g, Saturated Fat 1g, Cholesterol 0mg, Sodium 1350mg, Total Carbohydrate 21g, Protein 17g.

by Anna Marie Cesario and Jennifer Vahalik, U&I Collaboration, LLC.

Food product development and consumer research veterans, Anna Marie Cesario and Jennifer Vahalik, join *Alt-Meat* magazine as contributors to our regular “Taste Test” column. Here’s how the program works: The alternative meat item is distributed to consumers, including the core demographic, for preparation in their own homes. No instructions are provided to the consumer, other than to write their overall impressions of the product, as well as to evaluate the flavor, texture, packaging and ease of use. Cesario and Vahalik look for common threads by using Getting It!®, a system developed to listen to consumers about products. The sample of people is not intended to be a “taste test” in a controlled setting, nor is it intended to simulate a focus group. Others are doing both. Rather, the intent is to interpret the response of the people who might purchase a product like this and use it, simply based on their encounters with the product in their individual, unique home environment. That is how U&I has been developing cutting-edge product and people understanding since 1999.

they look and taste like. They were good plain, but even better with the Buffalo sauce.”

“This is a totally manufactured product,” one half of our couple said. “There was no texture to the meat, the breading was a soggy mess following oven prep instructions, and the sauce was too powerful. The sodium is insane at 59% of your daily value for just six pieces of chicken.”

“The wings don’t look like wings,” noted a vegetarian taster. “They look like frozen chicken nuggets. The texture is similar to real chicken nuggets out of the air fryer. I didn’t care for the large packet of Buffalo sauce, since it would be difficult to save, but I made a last-minute decision to dip the chicken in the sauce. The sauce was spicy, but I was a fan.”

A 30-year-old “disciplined eater” shared, “I made these in the air fryer because I like crispy wings. Probably could have used less sauce, but the flavor was good, if a little spicy. While the taste of the nugget was overwhelmed by the sauce, the texture was good, like a boneless wing.” Her meat-eating boyfriend added, “The texture is there. Not bad for not ‘chicken.’”

CONCLUSION

A vegetarian concluded, “Although I like many other Gardein products, I wouldn’t buy these because the heat was just too much, and I was disappointed in the size of the nuggets.”

“I liked them and would definitely buy these again, but I would be mindful of where I purchase them because the price varies a lot at different stores,” noted another vegetarian.

Our mom of teen sons said, “The wing itself isn’t great, and the sauce was overpowering. I would not purchase these again.”

A vegetarian decided, “I will buy these again as I’m a big fan of Gardein products, and they’re often on sale. I ate them with some cilantro-lime rice and roasted broccoli, so it was a quick 15 minutes to prepare everything. It’s nice for a once-in-a-while treat meal.”

Our couple, who enjoy trying different foods but are not regular plant-based eaters, said, “We definitely would not buy these. There was no texture and no flavor except for the sauce, and it was overpriced.”

Mom concluded, “While we’re not vegan, I love that we can purchase a dairy-free Buffalo chick’n as my daughter is allergic to dairy and many other Buffalo options contain milk. It was nice that the sauce was separate so we could add as much or as little as we wanted. I would purchase these again as a tasty alternative to chicken.”

“Although these ‘boneless wings’ were tasty enough, I would not buy it again because they were too caloric, but not tasty enough to eat without the sauce, which was too spicy,” concluded our vegan. “Although they were a good texture, they were not satisfying enough as a faux Buffalo wing.”

Many of our tasters referred to the Gardein Chik’n Wings as “nuggets,” so it’s bewildering that Gardein chose to call these “wings.” For most, the nuggets seemed to have an acceptable texture and crispness — especially when prepared in the air fryer — which is quite commendable. Most found the Buffalo Sauce too spicy, but perhaps suggesting the option to dunk the wings in the sauce instead of tossing the wings with all the sauce is a simple solution. Price was a concern for some, but savvy shoppers will look for them on sale.