

A Foodie's Guide to Cyber Monday 2011

Are you Cyber Hungry?

For many a foodie, that's what Cyber Monday is all about. Even in an age when mainstream grocers carry their share of gourmet goods, there are still hard-to-find items and regional favorites that are best sourced online. And foodies not only like to buy these treats for themselves, they also like to shop for them as holiday gifts. Put it all together and you have a \$6 billion marketplace – yes, billion with a “b” – in mail-order edibles.



I should know. I've been buying foods online, from Costa Rican coffee to Chicago-style pizza, since practically the birth of the Internet. And I've written about such food finds for The Wall Street Journal as far back as 1999. Given that many of my favorite merchants are offering Cyber Monday specials, here are some items that have caught my eye or tantalized my taste buds of late (keep in mind that prices quoted don't always include shipping charges):

A taste of...: Every city has its share of signature foods – and typically, an online purveyor eager to deliver them to your doorstep. For Chicago-style deep-dish pizza, I still swear by [Lou Malnati's](#) – the combination of its slightly sweet crust and savory sausage always does it for me; plus, its shipped-frozen, ready-to-bake pies always seem to come out perfectly in a home oven. (A good starter package of two sausage and two pepperoni pies runs \$82.99.) Conversely, if you want a taste of New York, consider a slice of a different sort – namely, a slice of [Junior's cheesecake](#). The Brooklyn institution turns out a perfectly dense and creamy version of the city's favorite dessert – in a variety of styles and flavors. (If you want something really over the top, go for the nearly three-pound Devil's Food Cheesecake – for \$39.95 – which features alternating layers of chocolate cake and cheesecake.)



For carnivores only: I've often considered the meat-by-mail category to be a one-merchant show – namely, [Lobel's](#), the New York butcher that delivers some of the tastiest and most tender prime beef I've encountered on the entire planet – well worth it despite its extraordinarily high price. But lately, I've found some other contenders. [Gilt Taste](#) is offering signature blends of ground beef, courtesy of butcher Bryan Flannery, that yield incredibly juicy burgers — frankly, the meat is so good, the bun almost gets in the way (a four-lb. sampler runs \$57.95). And if you want beef with a poetic pedigree, consider the meats from [Prescott Frost](#) – the great-grandson of American poet Robert Frost farms his cattle in a grass-fed and organic manner, resulting in honestly beefy-tasting beef. You can't go wrong with the rib-eye steak (\$24) as an introduction to the line.

Holy foods: The holidays are fruitcake time, and that means many a monastery is burning the midnight oil to meet the seasonal demand – for whatever reason, monks and fruitcake go hand in hand like Santa and plates of cookies. But religious orders of all sorts make other treats as well – and an enterprising outfit called [Monastery Greetings](#) has put together some of the best of them. In other words, they have a fine monk-made fruitcake (or should I say fruitcakes – four different versions in all), but they also have everything from marmalade to maple syrup. The most unique product? A line of gourmet popcorn – quite yummy, I might add – from Arizona’s Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (individual bags start at \$6.95). The product name says it all: Prayerfully Popped.

Fiery favorites: Are you a chili head? Or do you have one on your gift list? [ClubsGalore.com](#) has a Hot ‘n’ Spicy of the Month Club that fits the bill (starting at \$36.95 per month). Offerings vary, but a recent month’s mailing included a blistering Louisiana hot sauce, a jar of ghost pepper-flavored peanuts and a Stonewall Kitchen spicy relish – quite a nice and fiery compendium. On the other hand, if you just want a special bottle of hot sauce for that special someone, the folks at [Tabasco](#) have a mail-order exclusive – an eight-year-aged reserve sauce (\$24.95 per bottle) that should give a dish an elegant kick.

Chocolate-covered everything: It used to be that apples were the fruit of choice to enrobe in caramel and chocolate. But these days, I’m finding the fruit basket doesn’t stop there. [Harry & David](#) now dips its signature pears in chocolate (an assortment of four runs \$39.95). [Zingerman’s](#) carries chocolate-covered Clementine orange sections, imported from Italy (\$35 for a small box). And don’t forget [Chukar Cherries](#) – they do truly decadent things with Washington-grown cherries and chocolate (try the Cabernet Cherries, which blend in wine as well — \$9.75 per bag).

Lots o’ lobsta: You might think ordering lobster by mail is a waste of a perfectly good crustacean – and of a FedEx driver’s time. But you’d be wrong. I find that the lobsters shipped overnight by Maine purveyors inevitably arrive at my doorstep with plenty of fight still in them – and they taste far fresher (and sweeter) than the ones that have been sitting semi-comatose for days on end in my supermarket’s tank. One of the purveyors worth checking out: [GetMaineLobster.com](#), which offers smartly package assortments of lobsters and other goods (try the Maine Lobster Dinner for two for \$115.95, which includes mussels and even dessert – whoopee pies, also a Maine classic). But if you prefer your lobster in cooked form, [Lobster Anywhere](#) has a lobster “pie” that’s quite something – more a bake than a pie, it features prime pieces of lobster, topped with a cream sauce and cracker crumbs (shipped frozen — two pies for \$59).

Bacon and more bacon: By now, I’d have thought the bacon-with-anything craze would have played itself out. But these days, you can still find bacon as a flavoring for just about, well, anything. My new favorite in this category? The Bacon Caramel Corn (at \$9.98 a bag) from [Swiss Maid Fudge](#) – a strangely addictive sweet-meets-salty confection. (I’d pass on their bacon-flavored chocolate fudge, however.) If you prefer bacon in a more traditional savory vein, the bacon-wrapped filets (six for \$114.95 from meat purveyor [Allen Brothers](#) are worthy of gifting. And if you want plain ol’ unadorned bacon, the smoked-meat pros at [Nueske’s](#) have plenty of options – apple wood-smoked, cherry wood-smoked, etc.