# Christmas 2026 festive treats demand years of planning amid rising market pressure



With summer in full swing, food and drink brands are already deep into preparations for the busy Christmas season ahead. While Britons bask in the sun and indulge in barbecues and social outings, companies like Cadbury, Mr Kipling, and Dr Oetker are planning their festive offerings for Christmas 2026. This process is not merely a seasonal sprint but rather a marathon that encompasses months, if not years, of dedicated work.

According to Nicole Partridge, brand manager for Christmas and Halloween at Mondelez International, the planning can take an extensive timeline. The recent revival of Cadbury Dairy Milk Coins, for example, was a project that required five years of meticulous planning. Such advanced preparation is crucial; during the festive period, demand can lead to production requirements that necessitate year-round manufacturing, as seen with Cadbury’s Heroes and Roses.

Other brands, like Mars Wrigley UK, begin their holiday preparations up to 18 months ahead of time. Laura O'Neill, Senior Brand Manager for Christmas at Mars, notes that product development incorporates trend research, rigorous taste tests, and eye-catching packaging design to stand out in a crowded market. Premier Foods follows suit, marking a similar timeline for their Christmas preparations, showing how significantly collaborative efforts across marketing, research and development, and production are emphasised.

Challenger brands, however, often operate with a greater sense of agility. For instance, Sauce Shop launched its Brussels Sprouts Ketchup in just a few months back in 2019, capitalising on a novel idea that paid off when it sold over 200,000 bottles. Co-founder Pam Digva explains that small brands can react quickly to market trends, especially those that primarily utilise direct-to-consumer channels. Yet, when working with larger retailers like Aldi, the timelines extend, necessitating earlier ideation and planning phases.

The development of new products, especially those intended for the Christmas market, remains fraught with challenges. Research reveals that up to 80% of new grocery launches fail, placing immense pressure on brands to discover the right combination of flavour innovation and market readiness. For brands like Ritter Sport, leveraging international trends while incorporating local tastes has become crucial. Managing Director Benedict Daniels emphasises the importance of utilising consumer data to refine product offerings by analysing past successes and failures.

The stalwart of festive treats, Cadbury, continues to tap into its rich history for inspiration. Partridge highlights that besides analysing product sales from previous years, the company actively engages with its community on social media platforms to gauge consumer preferences. This feedback is vital; nostalgic offerings like the Cadbury Dairy Milk Coins, which recently returned after a nine-year hiatus, illustrate how history and contemporary demand can converge to create a compelling product.

Interestingly, smaller with direct-to-consumer setups have a distinct advantage in gathering this data, allowing for rapid adjustments in product lines. Digva points out that ideas that initially seemed impractical—such as the Brussels Sprout Ketchup—eventually flourished due to keen insights from their community and broader market trends. This adaptive approach is more challenging for larger companies that oftentimes have more rigid structures, where changes must pass through numerous levels of approval.

The operational intricacies that underpin the launch of Christmas products are an inherent part of the festive food narrative. Jen Johnson, head of marketing at Dr Oetker, emphasises the excitement of bringing innovative products to market, even amid the frenetic pace necessary to meet deadlines. O’Neill echoes this sentiment regarding taste tests, which become collaborative highlights amidst a challenging work environment.

Despite the inevitable pressures, the industry thrives on creativity and collaboration. Smaller brands like Sauce Shop and ManiLife operate in a whirlwind of creativity, especially during the summer barbecue season when planning for Christmas ramps up. Co-founder Stu Macdonald underscores how this flexibility allows for experimentation and rapid responses to consumer trends—an essential factor as seasonal appeal grows with each passing year.

As the timeline for Christmas product launches draws nearer, brands not only compete for shelf space but also for attention in evolving consumer behaviour. For many, including Cadbury, this means starting as early as late August for in-store products, ramping up significantly from September onwards. With festive products generating over £13 billion in sales during December 2024 alone, the timing and strategic planning for these launches cannot be overstated.

The significant challenge of product placement becomes even more pronounced as seasonal offerings from various brands vie for consumer attention. Johnson mentions that her team frequently collaborates with retailers to place products in high-footfall areas, maximising visibility. This becomes especially critical for brands reliant on impulse purchases, as ManiLife discovered with its Mince Pienut Butter, learning that strategic site placements could vastly improve sales outcomes.

As brands navigate the complexities of product innovation and market strategy, the overarching aim remains clear: meet consumer demands and capitalise on the festive spirit. The allure of nostalgia, coupled with a commitment to innovation, has paved the way for brands big and small to contribute to what has become a vibrant and competitive Christmas food marketplace.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/analysis-and-features/how-brands-create-new-christmas-foods-every-year/704715.article)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/analysis-and-features/how-brands-create-new-christmas-foods-every-year/704715.article), [[2]](https://www.lincsonline.co.uk/lifestyle/cadbury-christmas-treat-returns-to-shelves-after-almost-a-de-9330468/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/analysis-and-features/how-brands-create-new-christmas-foods-every-year/704715.article), [[3]](https://www.grocerygazette.co.uk/2023/11/20/cadbury-chocolate-coins-2023/)
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* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.lincsonline.co.uk/lifestyle/cadbury-christmas-treat-returns-to-shelves-after-almost-a-de-9330468/), [[6]](https://www.kentonline.co.uk/news/trending/cadbury-christmas-treat-returns-to-shelves-after-almost-a-de-293400/)
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* Paragraph 13 – [[1]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/analysis-and-features/how-brands-create-new-christmas-foods-every-year/704715.article), [[3]](https://www.grocerygazette.co.uk/2023/11/20/cadbury-chocolate-coins-2023/)
* Paragraph 14 – [[1]](https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/analysis-and-features/how-brands-create-new-christmas-foods-every-year/704715.article), [[5]](https://www.nationalworld.com/lifestyle/food-and-drink/cadbury-bringing-back-popular-christmas-chocolate-for-first-time-in-10-years-4337793)
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/analysis-and-features/how-brands-create-new-christmas-foods-every-year/704715.article> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.lincsonline.co.uk/lifestyle/cadbury-christmas-treat-returns-to-shelves-after-almost-a-de-9330468/> - Cadbury Dairy Milk chocolate coins have returned to UK supermarket shelves after a nine-year absence. The confectionery giant discontinued the iconic Christmas treat in 2014, leading to disappointment among fans. In response to customer demand, Cadbury has reintroduced the golden foil-coated coins ahead of the festive season, with bags priced at £1.99 and a limited edition gift tin available for £6.99. This move follows similar reintroductions of retro Christmas sweets, such as Nestlé's Coffee Creme, which is also making a comeback after 20 years. The return of these treats has been met with enthusiasm from consumers eager to relive nostalgic festive moments.
3. <https://www.grocerygazette.co.uk/2023/11/20/cadbury-chocolate-coins-2023/> - Cadbury has announced the return of its Dairy Milk Chocolate Coins for the 2023 Christmas season, after nearly a decade off UK shelves. The brand is celebrating this comeback with a festive marketing campaign, including a billboard activation featuring houses adorned with Cadbury-branded Christmas lights. The coins are available in grocery retailers, including Morrisons and Sainsbury’s, priced at £6, with Asda offering a money box and an additional refill for £7.50. This reintroduction follows the brand's response to customer feedback and aims to revitalise the Christmas spirit with a beloved product.
4. <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/whats-on/food-drink/cadburys-christmas-dairy-milk-money-8908183> - Cadbury's Dairy Milk chocolate coins have made a festive return to UK supermarket shelves after nearly a decade. Discontinued in 2014 due to declining sales, the iconic treat is now available again, with bags priced at £1.99 and a limited edition gift tin for £6.99. The reintroduction has been met with enthusiasm, as consumers recall fond memories of this classic Christmas confection. The coins are available at various retailers, including Morrisons, Sainsbury's, and Asda, marking a nostalgic comeback for chocolate lovers.
5. <https://www.nationalworld.com/lifestyle/food-and-drink/cadbury-bringing-back-popular-christmas-chocolate-for-first-time-in-10-years-4337793> - Cadbury is bringing back its popular Dairy Milk Chocolate Coins for the 2023 Christmas season, marking the first time the treat has been seen on shelves in nearly a decade. The coins, discontinued in 2014, are now available in single bags for £1.99 and in bundles as part of festive kits. This reintroduction follows customer feedback and aims to bring back the nostalgia and joy associated with this beloved holiday product. The coins are available online from Cadbury Gifts Direct and at various UK retailers.
6. <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/news/trending/cadbury-christmas-treat-returns-to-shelves-after-almost-a-de-293400/> - Cadbury's Dairy Milk chocolate coins have returned to UK supermarket shelves after a nine-year absence. The confectionery giant discontinued the iconic Christmas treat in 2014, leading to disappointment among fans. In response to customer demand, Cadbury has reintroduced the golden foil-coated coins ahead of the festive season, with bags priced at £1.99 and a limited edition gift tin available for £6.99. This move follows similar reintroductions of retro Christmas sweets, such as Nestlé's Coffee Creme, which is also making a comeback after 20 years. The return of these treats has been met with enthusiasm from consumers eager to relive nostalgic festive moments.
7. <https://www.joe.ie/life-style/cadbury-favourite-returns-780135> - Cadbury has announced the return of its beloved Dairy Milk Chocolate Coins for the 2023 Christmas season, nearly a decade after their discontinuation. The coins, discontinued in 2014, are now available in both a Festive Net (£1.99) and a decorative Money Tin (£6.99). This reintroduction follows customer feedback and aims to bring back the nostalgia and joy associated with this iconic holiday treat. The coins are available across the UK from September, marking a festive comeback for chocolate lovers.