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Sweet's time has come – again Author: TENLEY WOODMAN Edition: ALL
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:A nostalgic sweet is staging a comeback, from candy stores to restaurant menus. "Licorice is having a renaissance," said Robin's Candy owner Robin Helfand (robinscandy.com). "I think the culinary world is just exploding. People are much more open to trying different things," said Suzanna Bradley, pastry chef at Strega Prime, which serves a gingerbread cupcake with black licorice frosting. "This is something they might try even if they don't like black licorice." According to the National Confectioners Association, licorice is rebounding. Licorice sales were up 2.4 percent in grocery, drug and merchant stores over the last year. On the local food scene, Restaurant Dante in Cambridge adds licorice to espresso while Tryst in Arlington serves a slow-braised duck and parsnip biscuit with licorice as an appetizer. Helfand's Newbury Street shop, an offshoot of Robin's Candy in Great Barrington, opened here last year and boasts more than 65 varieties of licorice. Helfand said she likes to follow candy trends — sour and savory are hot items, such as Tabasco Jelly Belly jelly beans — but the store's licorice collection was created for sentimental reasons. "My mother was a fan. It was her favorite candy," she said. The unique flavor is an acquired taste for some. Helfand stocks a wide variety of licorice products, from Egyptian licorice root (\$2.98) and Swedish Lakerol pastilles (\$4.98), to Good & Plenty and distinctive Dutch styles, like the salty double zout (available in mix-and-match for \$16.99 per pound). "We are known for our tastings. Most focus on chocolate and fudge, but increasingly they focus on licorice," she said. Her stock includes soft and chewy, and firm and salty, and even encompasses hard-to-find items like Black Jack gum, Sen-Sen, the Victorian breath freshener (it is currently out of production, but can be found by asking for it at Robin's Candy), Drop Sirop, a Dutch syrup taken by spoonful or with hot water and lemon, and licorice Altoids. Helfand's favorites are the Dutch styles. "They are known for having the greatest variety in terms of sweet to salty, soft to firm, and smooth to textured," she said. Her current mix also includes English Pontefract, Italian Puntini licorice chips and Black Australian Kookaburra licorice, but she's always looking to expand. "It's an ongoing process," she said. "I'm not done collecting." — tenley.woodman@bostonherald.com

Caption:

TREND TAKES ROOT: Robin's Candy owner Robin Helfand displays just a few of the shop's more than 65 varieties of licorice. STAFF PHOTOS BY PATRICK WHITTEMORE Copyright (c) 2013 Boston Herald
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