

## Reduction of Plastic in Restaurants

### Much material from Beyond Plastics

- **The upfront costs may give you pause, but the break-even point comes swiftly.**
- **Forty-four percent of plastic litter in the ocean is composed of takeout food and drink containers.**

There are several options for reducing plastic used in restaurants.

1) Switching to reusables, i.e. ceramic table ware, glassware and metal cutlery is a major switch and investment, but the payback is faster than most expect, with ongoing savings for the bottom line and the landfill.

2) Reducing the number of implements handed out in takeout situations. New York City recently passed “Skip the Stuff.” Many customers do not want or need cutlery to go with their take out meals. Worth the ask to reduce the amount and cost of one-use items passed out.

3) Substituting reusable or compostable containers and implements for the plastic option. Unfortunately, the compostability of some products is marginal. Many compostable materials are compostable only in a commercial composting facility, which few communities have access to. When plant based plastics are landfilled they break down similarly to plastic - smaller and smaller pieces. If they are termed recyclable, they can contaminate plastic recycling.

Solution: natural materials, paper, metal and wood products.

### Reusables Where Possible Have Quick Return on Investment

Although the upfront costs are higher, the payback period for switching to durable goods can be as short as a few months, and over their lifetimes reusables use less energy and water than single-use containers, even after dishwashing. And the amount of trash going to landfills is greatly reduced over time.

The pay-back period for switching to reusables is remarkably brief.

For instance, a disposable 12 oz hot cup distributed with a plastic lid may cost a vendor 10 cents. A white stoneware mug of the same size can be purchased for \$1.70. A cafe that uses as few as 10 cups per hour will more than recouped the expense in 17 uses. After that, every use of the cup represents a 10 cent savings.

According to a 2021 analysis by Upstream, reusable cups break even at between 2 and 122 uses, plates at 3 to 50 uses, and utensils as rapidly as twice.(31)

Presenting food on reusable dishware increases customer satisfaction and builds brand loyalty.

To alleviate the financial investment to switch to reusable, there is good news! Plastic Free Restaurants pays restaurants and schools to eliminate petroleum-based single-use plastic by subsidizing the purchase of reusable replacements. The organization is a donor-funded non-profit and can be reached at [contact@plasticfreerestaurants.org](mailto:contact@plasticfreerestaurants.org)

### Take Out items

Most towns and cities in the United States are capable of processing only items with plastic resin codes #1 and #2 with necks, so jugs, bottles. Many of #s 1, 2, and 5 items, such as plastic clamshells, are not recyclable.

Likewise, bio-compostable plastics can be difficult to process even under industrial conditions. Only 29% of full-scale food waste composting facilities in the United States are willing to accept them.

Comparisons of throw away plastic and compostable or paper alternatives are difficult because there are so many options. Costco and Walmart now regularly carry such items.

World Centric lists several types of “compostable” products. There are plant based with PLA liner. (PLA is bio plastic).

According to BP, Reusable Food Serviceware Guide is one of the best available and boasts a comprehensive list of wares, from utensils to take-out boxes, with links to their vendors and specifications. The guide includes a cost benefit analysis worksheet with a guide to interpreting results. Unfortunately I was “denied access” but requested access and just received the guide, which they are updating.

I checked a few items at Webrestaurant and World Centric but found such variation in style and product that I gave up for the moment.

Item	Std. Plastic		ALternative (BPI)
16 oz. Cold cup	PET .07/09 88.45/1000		.21(veg-based bioplastic-clear) 216.71/1000
16 oz. Hot cup	.17 88.49/500		.16. no tree paper 163.06/1000
6x6x3 container, hinged lid	.07 white foam 35.49/500		.22 Fiber 110/500
8x8x3 container, hinged lid	.46 PET 46.49/100		.87 PLA* 242.23/300
10 in. plate	.09 Foam 47.99/500		.20 Fiber 163.51/800
12 oz. Round container	.08 Foam 42.99/500		.16 no tree paper 82.99/500
Knife, fork, spoon set			

\*PLA — Polylactic acid, also known as **PLA**, is a thermoplastic monomer derived from renewable, organic sources such as corn starch or sugar cane.

Found this catchy graphic on BBC.com. Date unknown.

