

**Are you
wasting
£17,000 a
year on salad**



Ten ways to stop food waste.

Let's face it, 'salad' isn't cheap – especially out of season. It's a delicate item in your kitchen that needs tender handling and specialist storage – and its shelf life for 'crisp freshness' is short. If you buy the bags of prepared 'leaves' you pay a fortune, if you stick to traditional whole lettuce you extend the prep time (and your wage bill) with washing and picking.

So why is salad the garnish of choice? And what's the point if most of it comes back into the kitchen and is scraped into the bin uneaten?

Effectively you are **paying at five levels:**

- **Buy** products - (lettuce, tomato, cucumber, peppers onions, herbs and dressing),
- **Store** products - refrigerators (electricity, cleaning costs)
- **Prepare** products – wash, pick, chop (wage costs)
- **Serve** products – plate-up (wage costs)

And, ultimately:

- **Dispose of** - the same products (bin collection fees)

With the healthy food movement trying to steer consumers towards healthier choices, I'm not for one minute suggesting you get rid of salad. But isn't it time you stopped 'giving' it away as garnish to people who haven't asked for it?

600,000 tonnes of food is wasted by restaurants every year

With the Sustainable Restaurant Association (www.thesra.org) suggesting that for every meal eaten in a UK restaurant, nearly half a kilo of food is wasted – through preparation, spoilage and what's left behind on the plate – food waste is the current hot topic.

The SRA says we're binning a whopping 600,000 tonnes of food waste from restaurants every year. That's the equivalent of **three double decker buses** for every restaurant - and 34% of that figure is coming off diners' plates! At an estimated **cost of £17,000 to each restaurant annually** (£8,000 for pubs or £0.41 per meal) and **£2,800 for every tonne of food wasted**, it's costing everyone – caterers and diners - a fortune. Then there's the environmental cost of air miles wasted to get the food to your business, then sending this food mountain to landfill.

However, while these headline grabbing figures are huge, there are significant opportunities for caterers to reduce costs by tackling food waste.

What gets thrown away?

According to a WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme) survey, younger people and females are the ones most likely to leave food on their plates out of home and it's the 'plate fillers' that are most frequently left. So, that's mainly salad garnish, vegetables and chips.

Profitability

This can be put simply as £1 earned vs £1 saved.

Every £1 saved goes straight into your pocket,

Every £1 earned has costs and overheads associated with it.

So where's the sense in loading a plate up with items you're going to put into the bin?

Also, many busy kitchens actually employ a 'garnish person' whose sole job it is to load plates up with the 'plate fillers' that you'll later chuck away. While that's only £3.72/hour for a 16/17 year old, it could be £3.72/hour added to your bottom line if you work round it.

What can you do?

1. Get a handle on what's really happening in your business. Instead of scraping items into the bin when plates are collected – scrape returned salad garnish into a separate clear plastic tub and chips into another clear plastic tub during a busy service. Then assess the cost of the waste – you could be in for a shock. Accurately spec'ing out what a standard garnish is, and its exact cost, will help here.
2. Identify which items are the worst offenders for stuff that doesn't get eaten and redesign how you present these dishes using different plates and layouts to make them easy on the eye but without the unnecessary frills.
3. Help people to order the appropriate dish by making your menus more flexible in terms of portion size and choice (For pubs, a recent sector-wide consumer survey

showed that 82% of customers were in favour of having smaller portion sizes for a lower price).

4. Make it clear what's included in the meal then offer side dishes as options so that customers 'build' their meal ordering only what they want (and therefore eat).
5. Doggy bags or boxes – the SRA's 'Too Good to Waste' campaign (www.toogoodtowaste.co.uk) aims to make it not only acceptable but positive for diners to ask to take their uneaten food home. The 100% recycled material and biodegradable boxes are available from www.londonbiopackaging.com or get your own made with your business logo
6. Use prep waste in the creation of other dishes (using veg trimmings such as broccoli stalks or leek trimmings for soup, meat bones and trimmings for flavouring stocks)
7. Train staff to be more aware of the waste issue, especially in terms of portion control. For example, using individual mini baskets for sides such as chips can seriously add to your bottom line. Also, recycling waste doesn't attract landfill tax so make sure they're putting the right stuff in the right bin
8. Are you storing your short shelf life stock correctly? Review your stock management and delivery procedures for these items – a very simple way to reduce spoilage waste. Check fridges are working correctly
9. Appoint a 'Kitchen Champion' to keep a close eye on 'use by' dates, then avoid waste by using them in extra dishes or specials
10. Relearn (if necessary) and pass on forgotten skills for getting the most out of different cuts of meat, veg and other produce

