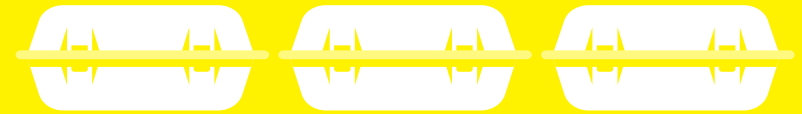


4. Packaging



Packaging has transformed the way we store and consume food. It can be a force for good, keeping things fresh and helping reduce food waste. But we have become a throw-away society addicted to the convenience of single-use packaging. The damaging impact this is having on the environment cannot be over-stated.

The UK's hospitality and food service sector throws away 1.3 million tonnes of packaging each year¹⁶.

Many food businesses are waking up to the seriousness of this issue and are working hard to help bring this staggering figure down. This section of the guide shows you how you can play your part.

Things you can do to make a difference

4a. Incoming packaging

- Reduce – Buy in bulk, switch to refills and work with your supply chain to cut down on transit packaging
- Re-use – explore the many benefits of returnable packaging such as crates and trays
- Recycle – Separate all single-use packaging out for recycling – set up a recycling collection if you don't already have them

4b. Outgoing packaging

- Reduce – Stop selling products in single-use packaging
- Reuse – Set up or join a re-use/refill scheme – incentivise your customers to join in
- Recycle – Make it easy for customers to recycle your packaging and set up a recycling collection point for products that your customers can't easily recycle at home or on the go



4a. Incoming packaging

When seeking to reduce your business' reliance on packaging – and single-use packaging in particular – your supply chain is a good place to start.

What supplies are coming into your business? How are they being delivered? Could your suppliers be doing more to reduce the amount of packaging your business has to deal with?

Reduce

We've all been there. You order a stapler, or something similarly small, online. It's delivered the next day in a vast cardboard box; the item you purchased surrounded by copious amounts of bubble wrap and brown paper. You raise your eyebrows, frustrated by the wastefulness.

You know it's always best to reduce waste by not creating it in the first place. But are your suppliers pulling their weight when it comes to the fight against unnecessary packing?

Carry out a review of all the ingredients, consumables and supplies coming into your food business. Is all the packaging they arrive in really necessary?

Could you be ordering the goods and supplies you rely on most in larger volumes? Buying in bulk can reduce the amount of packaging needed and can also lead to a lower cost per unit. Could you be purchasing supplies like cleaning products in refill packaging?

Speak to your suppliers and ask them what they can do to help eliminate all unnecessary packaging. You'll be amazed at what can be achieved.

Re-use

Once you've reduced any avoidable transit packaging, the next step is to replace single-use transit packaging with re-usable packaging wherever possible.

There are many benefits to having your supplies delivered in re-usable, returnable packaging:

- ♦ **Space-saving** – re-usable transit packaging like crates and trays are usually collapsible and, when not in use, can be stacked allowing optimum use of space. And don't forget, you won't need as many bins if you're not throwing as much packaging away!
- ♦ **Improved protection** – returnable transit packaging is inherently designed to be robust and durable, to withstand repeated use. This higher quality packaging does a better job of protecting produce when in transit.
- ♦ **Environmental** – re-using packaging is even better for the environment than recycling it.



Take-away

POCO, a Bristol-based tapas restaurant, has halved the amount of packaging waste it generates since it introduced a range of sustainability practices in 2013. The restaurant sources the majority of its food from local suppliers, who are discouraged from using single use packaging. Food not purchased daily, such as cheese, is stored in re-usable containers.

Ask your suppliers if they can deliver their products in re-usable transit packaging – you shouldn't expect to be asked to pay any more for this. If they say no, look for new suppliers that can.

Want to learn more?

[IFCO](#) and [Teacrate](#) are good examples of returnable packaging for fruit and vegetable deliveries.

[pluumo](#) is sustainable thermal packaging made out of surplus feathers for temperature-sensitive deliveries.

Some companies like [Raynors Foods](#) provide a take-back scheme to reduce packaging waste.



4. Packaging

Recycle

Give it your best shot, but it's unlikely, in the short-term at least, that you'll be able to reduce and re-use all your transit packaging. So the next stage is to ensure that any single-use packaging that does come into your business is recycled.

Recycling bins are becoming a more common sight in commercial kitchens and offices, but UK businesses are still lagging behind householders, who are now expected to separate out their recycling by their local council.

This hasn't gone unnoticed by your customers: more than a third (36%) of people in the UK believe that a system of fines or taxes should be introduced for businesses that don't take responsibility for recycling their packaging¹⁷.

By separating and recycling all your packaging waste, you can:

- ◆ reassure your customers that you are playing your part in the fight against waste
- ◆ reduce your environmental impact
- ◆ cut costs through cheaper waste management (it costs less to recycle packaging than it does to throw it away)
- ◆ motivate your staff – most of whom will be recycling at home and probably feel uncomfortable not doing so at work.

If you already have separate recycling collections in place, make sure that staff are clear on what materials can and can't go in the different bins (and that they are clearly labelled) so that you can recycle as much as possible.

If you don't already have separate recycling collections in place, speak to your waste management supplier. Compare the price they give with other waste management companies – your local authority may be able to provide advice on operators that work in your area.

And don't forget to keep an eye out for schemes that allow you to recycle materials not commonly collected by waste management companies. [Recorked UK](#), which recycles used wine bottle corks, is a great example.

17. Ecover, survey of 2,007 shopper, 2018



4b. Outgoing packaging

Your suppliers could probably be doing more to reduce single-use transit packaging. Working with them to tackle packaging waste will make a big difference. But it's likely that your food business is also responsible for producing its own packaging waste.

The convenience of wastefulness

Most of the packaging you provide to your customers is driven by convenience. Small sachets of salt and pepper; single-serve containers of butter, spreads and milk. These are common items in the food business sector.

Yes they are convenient, but they are also incredibly wasteful. This small-format packaging can be difficult to recycle and worst of all, it is often thrown away unfinished or even unopened.

When it comes to take-away food, convenience is the name of the game. But the amount of packaging this thirst for convenience is creating is mind-blowing. For example, British workers' habit for on-the-go lunches is creating 11 billion items of packaging waste per year, according to new research from environmental charity Hubbub.

If your food business involves some sort of takeaway element, your customers are unlikely to be willing to give up the convenience of packaging entirely. The challenge for you is to transition to sustainable alternatives to single-use packaging (particularly plastics) without disrupting your businesses.

Reduce

The first step is to review all the packaging used in your business and identify what could be eliminated or reduced.

For drinks consumed on your premises, you may decide to stop selling them in single use packaging such as plastic bottles, aluminium cans or glass bottles – consider serving fizzy drinks from a 'beverage gun' or dispenser.

Simple things can make a huge difference – stop automatically giving cutlery, napkins and straws to your customers. They're still available if needed, but you will see a big reduction in their use just by asking customers if they need them instead of assuming that they do.

Re-use

It's relatively easy to replace single-use products (such as napkins, straws and cutlery) with re-usable ones.

You could also introduce or sign up to an existing re-use, refill or bring-your-own scheme. Refillable coffee cups and water bottles are all the rage at the moment. Let's make this excellent trend spread to all sorts of takeaway containers and even cutlery. Why not? It's just a matter of customers and retailers getting used to the idea – and incentives being put in place to encourage the change.



4. Packaging

If you're tempted to introduce a re-use or refill scheme to your customers, there are two ways you can go about it:

Create your own scheme – offer customers a discount if they bring their own food or drink container. Savure, a pasta restaurant near Old Street in London, gives a 35p discount to customers who bring their own container and 50p discount to those who use a re-usable stainless steel container purchased at the shop. Meanwhile, Spicebox (see case study, right) provides Indian take-aways in traditional, re-usable tiffin boxes.

Join an existing managed scheme – team up with a trusted partner who will manage the logistical side of things for you. These schemes provide stickers for your windows and offer customers maps and information via apps to make participating outlets easier to find. Some even collect, wash and re-supply the re-usable containers and cups. [Cupclub](#), [Ozarka](#), [#LongLiveTheLunchbox](#) and [CauliBox](#) are just a few examples.

Case Study

Cutting water bills by a third

THE TIFFIN TIN IS ONE OF INDIA'S MOST SUCCESSFUL CONCEPTS. IT'S A HOMEMADE MEAL, DELIVERED TO OFFICE WORKERS WITH CLOCKWORK EFFICIENCY IN A REUSABLE METAL TIN; AND NOW IT'S COME TO WALTHAMSTOW!

When **Spicebox** opened its doors in January 2019, it decided to offer take away meals in reusable tiffins as an alternative to single-use foil or plastic cartons. Customers enjoy the fully plant-based menu safe in the knowledge that they're producing zero

waste. Spicebox estimates they've avoided the use of approximately 2000 takeaway trays and naan bags in the first year of operation!

It goes without saying that all paper, cardboard, glass and hard plastics are recycled and Spicebox recently introduced 'flexi-plastic' recycling, so even clingfilm and soft plastics don't end up in the bin. Next step on the hit list is tetra-packs, which remain surprisingly difficult to recycle commercially, despite it being available to the majority of households in London.



Take-away

Have you **#GotTheBottle** to put your tap on the map and join over 20,000 businesses who are already part of the Refill Campaign? The average Londoner buys three single-use plastic water bottles per week – that's 175 bottles per year, per person! By making a tap publically accessible you could be keeping Londoners hydrated and helping to prevent plastic pollution. Simply register the details of your refill station on the [Refill London website](#) and you can create a profile on the app-based map. Once your station is live, you'll be ready to welcome thirsty refillers and benefit from increased exposure and footfall as a result



4. Packaging

Whichever option you go for, be sure to consider how you're going to incentivise your customers to take part; how you're going to measure portions at the point of sale; and that all your hygiene and public health requirements are met.

Recycle

Ultimately, the responsibility to recycle the take-away packaging provided by your food business is down to your customers. But you can make life a lot easier for them, and encourage them to 'do the right thing', by thinking about the packaging materials you use.

Make sure any packaging you use can be easily recycled by your customers, ideally using the doorstep collection service provided by their local council. More information can be found on the [Recycle Now](#) website.

Avoid using black plastic tubs and trays – these can be difficult to recycle as the recycling machines (which rely on optical lasers to sort the recycling) struggle to pick up black plastics.

It's becoming increasingly popular for retailers and food outlets to use compostable packaging. This can be a good option, but there are some things to watch out for:

Make sure the packaging is certified as compostable – look out for the 'compostable' logo (right). This confirms that the packaging meets strict standards for compostability (EN13432) and that it can in theory be accepted by industrial composting or anaerobic digestion facilities used by London's local authorities.

Think about the recycling services available to your customers. It's all very well providing them with packaging and tableware that 'in theory' could be composted, but it's not as simple as that: the majority of anaerobic digestion and composting facilities used by London's 32 local councils do not currently accept these products, which means they're not included in doorstep recycling collection services. This just leaves the customer confused and frustrated; with their local council and with the food business that supplied the product to them in the first place.

You can help by setting up a collection point for compostable packaging that is not currently easily recycled from home. Ticking environmental boxes isn't good enough; you have a responsibility to make recycling easy for your customers.

Download and read the [Unwrapping Plastics toolkit](#) developed by the Sustainable Restaurant Association and Belu to identify easy ways to make a big difference on packaging.



Take-away

[Vegware](#) manufactures a wide range of packaging and tableware products made out of plants. Following use, these products that can be composted at commercial facilities and turned into soil conditioner and green energy.

To help clients access these specialist facilities, Vegware launched its own dedicated collection service called 'Close the Loop'. Food businesses can set up their own collection points for customers to use – Vegware will collect and ensure they are composted in a sustainable way.

Vegware has also partnered with RecycleBox (powered by [First Mile](#)) to offer a collection service of its products for food businesses or even individuals with small quantities of compostable Vegware products.

