

# FOODWARE RESOURCE GUIDE

At first glance, single-use disposable plates, cups, cutlery, and other foodware seem inexpensive and convenient. But it may be time to take a closer look at your business's use of disposables. Reusable foodware can provide significant benefits, including reducing costs and attracting more customers.

Reusables cost more per item to buy than their disposable counterparts, but they are durable products designed for thousands of uses. Over time, replacing disposable with reusable foodware can dramatically reduce your cost of doing business. Even factoring in the energy and water needed to wash reusable cutlery, plates, and cups, the overall environmental impact of reusables is also far less than disposables.

## IN-RESTAURANT DINING

**Reusable or going without** should be the top priority – remember, “only upon request” applies for customers dining in or taking food to go.

- See the “Break-Even Point Calculator” below.
- Reusable Food Serviceware Guide: [rethinkdisposable.org/resources](http://rethinkdisposable.org/resources).

If this is not an option, see the “to-go orders” section.

## Break-Even Point Calculator for Reusables

When choosing between a reusable or disposable item, it's important to think beyond the item's initial cost. Disposables are relatively inexpensive to buy, but you have to continually replenish your supply. Those ongoing costs add up fast. Reusables, on the other hand, cost more upfront but will be used over and over again. Use this calculator to determine your break-even point for the cost of reusable items. The break-even point is the number of uses required to recover your investment. As soon as you exceed the break-even point for a particular item, you'll be saving money.

### Break-even point calculator:

Cost of reusable (each) = \$ \_\_\_\_\_ ÷  
Cost of disposable item (each) = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Break-even point = \_\_\_\_\_ uses

*Example: Reusable cup = \$1.00 each ÷*


*Disposable cup = \$0.05 each*

*Breakeven point = 20 uses*

*After that you are saving money!*



### Always avoid

**Products labeled #6** in the “chasing arrows”  - this indicates polystyrene which is not allowed.

**Mixed materials** like paper and plastic bonded together.

Products described as “**oxo-degradable**.”

Products **destined for the landfill or made of virgin materials** - these are traditional plastics such as:


- **Products labeled #3, #4, and #5** in the “chasing arrows”  - these are not recyclable in Lake Tahoe.
- **PFAS:** Nonstick chemicals known as per- and poly-fluorinated alkyl substances (PFAS) are commonly used in disposable food packaging and food service ware as an oil and grease barrier. These are also known as “forever chemicals” and have terrible effects on the environment and human health.



Image by upkyak on Freepik

## Tips for selecting reusables (best option!)

**Price:** Prices can range widely depending on the quality and quantity ordered.

**Shop around:** Check online retailers, shop at local outlets, and visit membership distributors to find your best deal. Shopping locally gives you the opportunity to examine and handle the product before you buy. Online retailers may offer a wider variety of styles and very competitive prices.

**Quantity:** Don't buy more than you need. Factor in your busiest time of service and how frequently dishes can be washed.

**Style:** Look for items that match your cuisine, customers, and décor.

**Durability:** To ensure long-term savings, choose items that will last.

**Washing:** Consider your dishwashing capabilities when choosing each item.

## TO-GO ORDERS

**Reusables are still the best option.** As often as you are able, allow customers to use their own - such as tupperware, hot and cold beverage mugs and cups, and condiment containers.

**Paper/paperboard lined with foil (best option) or wax paper, foil trays, and 100% recycled plastic are the top alternatives to reusables.** Below, we recommend substitutes in general and by product category.

**Products made from recycled content** are the second best alternative - the higher the percentage of post-consumer recycled content, the better.

**“Compostable” or “biodegradable” are an option, but ONLY if approved** by the Compost Manufacturing Alliance (CMA) or the Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI - [products.bpiworld.org](http://products.bpiworld.org)). Foodservice ware products labeled “compostable” are not actually accepted in the composting facility that serves Lake Tahoe.

### Specific preferred alternatives

**Cold cups:** LDPE-coated paperboard and PLA-coated paperboard cups are the best options. Only provide lids if requested.

**Hot cups:** LDPE-coated paperboard and PLA-coated paperboard and wax-coated paperboard cups are the best options. Only provide lids and sleeves if requested.

**Plates and bowls:** Paperboard is the best option.

**Cutlery (forks, knives, spoons, straws, stirrers):** Bamboo or other bio-based materials (see above) are the best options.

**Clamshells:** Molded fiber or 100% recycled cardboard are the best options.

**Condiment cups:** Biobased fibers or PLA bioplastics are the best alternatives.

**Meat, poultry, and fish trays:** Biobased fibers or 100% recycled PET “rolled edge” trays.

**Plastic water bottles:** Empty aluminum bottles filled with Tahoe Tap are the best option. Encourage customers to use their own bottles by offering to fill them up.



**To-go ware on request only.** Provide cutlery, a straw, condiments, napkins, or a bag only if a customer asks for it.



### General preferred alternatives

Some terms and materials that you should look for in product descriptions:

**Biobased products:** Made, in whole or in part, from renewable materials, such as:

- plant-based fibers
- bamboo and other grasses
- cellulose from sources like potatoes, corn, palm leaf, etc.
- fiber crops such as hemp and flax
- agricultural waste such as sugarcane (bagasse) and rice straw
- materials derived from agricultural products such as starch and lactic acid (PLA)

**Bioplastics:** Derived from renewable bio-based sources, such as vegetable oil, corn starch, potato starch, or pea starch rather than traditional plastics derived from petroleum.

**Recyclable plastics:** Those labeled with #1 or #2 in the “chasing arrows” stamp (“PET” and “HDPE”).

**PLA and PHB:** (compostable plastic, but not compostable in Lake Tahoe).

**LPDE:** (Low Density Polyethylene, less toxins but still not a good plastic).

**Bio-wax**

**Soak Proof Shield™ coating** for paper/paperboard.

**Enshield® coating** for paper/paperboard.

For more information, and to view alternative resources, visit [keptahoebblue.org/stop-litter](http://keptahoebblue.org/stop-litter) or scan the QR code. Send us a question: [info@keptahoebblue.org](mailto:info@keptahoebblue.org)



[KEPTAHOEBBLUE.ORG/STOP-LITTER](http://KEPTAHOEBBLUE.ORG/STOP-LITTER) • (530) 541-5388 • @KEPTAHOEBBLUE

