

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO PLASTIC-FREE GUIDE FOR BOBA SHOPS



Boba shops across the Bay Area have successfully switched to **natural fiber** or **reusable** cups, straws, and other foodware to be more sustainable.

See What Other Boba Shops Are Doing!

iTea | Gong Cha | Alameda, CA

- Eliminated plastic cups and now use branded fiber boba cups.
- Replaced single-use plastic boba straw with fiber straws.



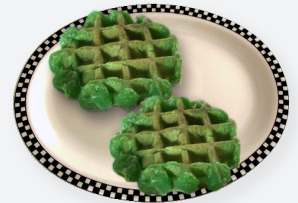
Nano's Ohana | Half Moon Bay, CA

- Sells branded reusable boba cups that come with a reusable lid and straw.
- Customers receive a discount when they bring their own boba cup or straw.
- Invested in reusable foodware for special weekend menu items - stainless steel trays with paper liners, which saves the business \$3,302 every year.



Mr. Green Bubble Tea | Menlo Park, CA

- Provides drinks in reusable mason jars.
- Uses reusable baskets, utensils, and a bussing station with eye-popping signage for their customers.
- Promotes dining onsite, which elevates the entire cafe experience as a memorable event, versus a pick-up and forget. And don't forget - crowds draw crowds!
- Uses a separate and detachable lid rather than a seal.



Teaspoon | Palo Alto, CA

- Serves boba tea in reusable mason jars with reusable straws when the customer stays on-site.
- Serves water in reusable plastic tumblers.
- A Bring-Your-Own cup discount is highly visible to guests.
- Developed a Bubble Straw Club with Girl Scout Troop 60016. Customers receive a free boba tea after bringing their own reusable straw 15 times.
- Sells stainless steel straws and branded boba tea cups in the cafe.



Tips on going Plastic-Free at your Boba Shop:

Use Natural Fiber Cups


- **Natural fiber** (e.g., paper, sugarcane, etc.) cups with the same dimensions as the plastic cups you are currently using may be used with your existing machinery. Test out different fiber cups to find ones that best work with your machinery.
- Your plastic seal may not seal as effectively onto a fiber cup as it did onto a plastic cup. Train your staff to instruct consumers to gently shake their boba beverage to prevent the seal from breaking. Make a sign to remind your staff and consumers to **shake gently**. Furthermore, you can train your staff to stir the beverage for your consumer so that they do not have to shake it.
- Consider using a **separate and detachable lid** that snugly fits onto the fiber cup rather than a plastic seal.

Reduce Single-Use Items For Take-Out

- Encourage brand loyalty and repeat visits with **frequent buyer cards** - “10th visit with your own cup gets you a free drink!”.
- Allow customers to **bring their own reusable cups** and containers, provide a discount when they do so, and advertise your policy.
- Provide **contactless pour**. Make sure to use a boba dispenser and operation that allows for no contact between the pouring utensil and the lip of the consumer’s reusable beverage container.
- Remember to only give out disposable **accessory items** (e.g., straws, utensils, stirrers, etc.) **only when requested** by the customer or with reusable dispensers for condiments and dispensers for utensils and other accessories that dispense one item at a time.

Reduce Single-Use Items For On-Site Dining

- Purchase **reusable cups** or mason jars and **reusable straws** for guests that dine on-site.
- Encourage **on-site dining and reusable foodware** to avoid the use of expensive disposable foodware.
- If you have space for guests to enjoy on-site dining, **consider applying a small fee for single-use** cups and containers. This helps incentivize customers to dine on-site to avoid the fee. Common fees range from \$0.25 - \$0.50 per cup/container.
- Purchase **bus tubs and carts** to collect reusables in the dining area.
- Post clear **customer engagement signage** such as “Leave used dishes here” and “Take only what you need”.
- Purchase easy to wash **reusable baskets** for snacks.



Eye-popping signage helps promote the switch to reusables at your boba shop to customers.

Reusables are Safe!

The County’s Environmental Health Services, consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, allows the use of reusable foodware during the COVID-19 pandemic when properly washed, rinsed, and sanitized. The County’s Office of Sustainability encourages the use of reusable foodware wherever possible to reduce cost, waste, litter, and elevate diner experience.

Need Help?

Reach out to the County’s Foodware Aware Team to help you design a custom reusable foodware model for your business. The typical time to get you all set up with a sustainability plan is less than one hour total starting with a free 30-minute in-person consultation to rolling out your new planet-forward foodware.

Businesses may be eligible for funding to purchase reusable foodware (which is double for Black, minority, woman, and LGBTQIA+ business owners.)

 www.smcsustainability.org/food-ware

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