



THE BAR GUIDE

A comprehensive guide to make your bar program more sustainable.

This guide was created by **Rebecca Gordon** and **Emily Robinson**. Their recommendations are derived from hands-on experience and evidence based research.

The Bar Guide

Over the last decade or so there's been a movement towards more sustainable food systems. Restaurants and bars have been urged to purchase food locally, to get to know their suppliers and their practices, to improve agricultural processes, to cut-out processed ingredients, to reduce food waste, and to generally put extensive thought into the procurement and preparation of our food. As a result, many restaurants are now offering local, sustainably sourced food wrapped up into healthy menu offerings with reasonable portions and systems to reduce waste throughout the service. Our way of thinking about food is shifting for the better, however there's still a section of procurement that often gets overlooked: the bar.

Bar procurement requires just as much thought and can oftentimes be even more wasteful. Our beverage services are laden with year-round imported products, unethically grown ingredients, air-freighted produce, and excessive waste of single-use or low-use packaging. It's time to start thinking of beverage service with the same set of priorities as foodservice. Everything from coffee and tea to tequila and limes has a footprint, and with the popularity of creative beverages on the rise, it's a great time to re-invent the classics.

Contents

1. Product Purchasing and Menu Development
2. Water and Energy Use
3. Service, Packaging and Waste
4. Employee Training and Wellness
5. The Checklist



Product Purchasing and Menu Development

Purchase seasonal, local and low-resource ingredients

Developing your menu around seasonal ingredients is more environmentally friendly and the ingredients also taste better because they are fresher. When you purchase seasonal ingredients, you are also often able to purchase from local suppliers. Purchasing from local suppliers is important because it means you are investing in their business and building a community. It's important to note that local procurement is most effectively an environmental initiative when done in line with seasonality. An Ontario greenhouse-grown strawberry in February can often be more energy intensive than one that's imported from further south. Cutting out the most resource-intensive steps is the main goal. Keeping this in mind, purchasing local is always a great community initiative and good for social sustainability, however seasonal purchasing helps ensure you are benefiting the environment as well.

“ Its important to note that local procurement is most effectively an environmental initiative when done in line with seasonality ”

How to find Ontario drink producers

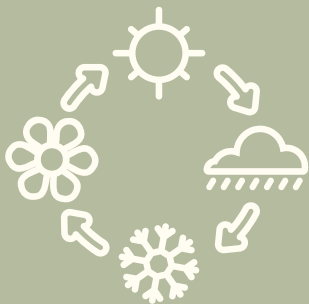
- [Ontario Craft Brewers](#)
- [Ontario Craft Cider Association](#)
- [Ontario VQA wines](#)
- [Craft Spirits Ontario](#)

Tip: Many of these producers make non-alcoholic drinks as well!



When planning your menus, learn what items are seasonal and local. To learn what items are in season, you can talk to your local suppliers or visit Farmers' Markets. Foodland Ontario also has a [seasonal food chart](#) which can be a great start as you plan your menus. For example, in the spring feature rhubarb cocktails, in the summer you could feature cocktails with berries and in the fall and winter feature apple-based drinks.

We have also gone through a huge boom in local drink producers. Often with local suppliers, you have to order directly from the company. While this may take you extra time to email an order in, there is a huge payoff. Customers are interested in trying new products and get excited when they learn the story of local suppliers. Make sure you are educating your staff on the products you bring in. Often local suppliers will meet with staff and run training and tasting sessions for free!



Sample Cocktails: Seasonal Spritzes

Cucumber and Mint



Local wines
and spirits

Replacing
citrus with
greenhouse
cucumber
and mint

WINTER

Strawberry and Rhubarb



Syrups made
from seasonal
imperfect
fruits

SPRING

Peach and Basil



Edible,
seasonal
garnishes

SUMMER

Apple and Cranberry

Apple
cranberry
compote
preserved
from earlier
in the season



FALL

Purchase Fair Trade ingredients

Fairtrade International is a globally recognized and trusted sustainable trading standard. Products that are designated fairtrade are often higher priced, but they provide more money to the farmers and workers so that they are able to receive a decent income and good work conditions. It's also been studied that consumers are willing to pay more for Fairtrade Certified products because they can trust that their money is going towards supporting farmers. Ingredients such as sugar, coffee, tea, chocolate and some tropical fruits can be purchased under fairtrade conditions.



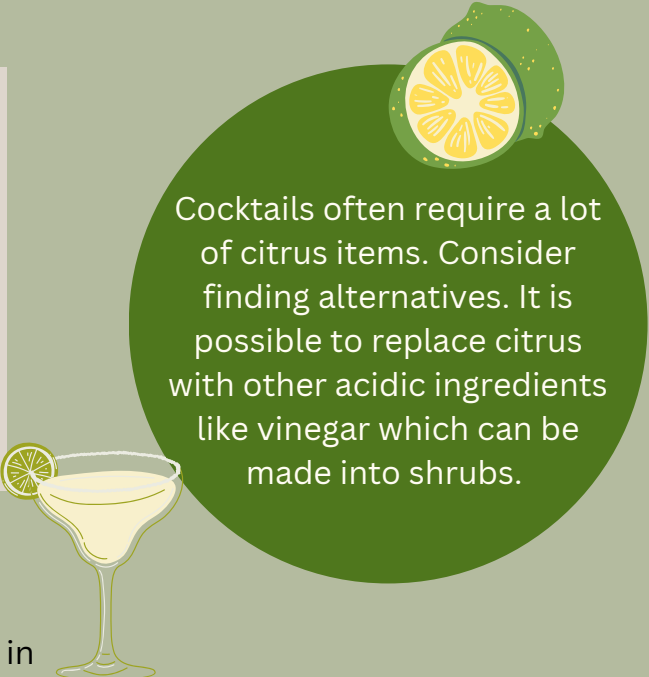
Some of our favourite local, Fairtrade suppliers:

Teas: Pluck Tea, Numi

Coffee: Balzacs, Planet Bean, Moonbean,

Chocolate: Camino

Use the [Fairtrade catalogue](#) to find more Fairtrade products



Cocktails often require a lot of citrus items. Consider finding alternatives. It is possible to replace citrus with other acidic ingredients like vinegar which can be made into shrubs.

Upcycling food for cocktails

Peels can be used as garnishes or used in tinctures and shrubs. Peels and seeds have a lot of flavour and can be used to infuse spirits or syrups. If you aren't able to use the whole fruit for your cocktails, consider developing a partnership with a business that could use the leftovers rather than throwing the product out. For example, if you are squeezing juice from citrus and not using the rinds, often soap companies would be happy to pick them up and use them in their products.

Cocktails are a fantastic way to use less desired parts of food. Many drinks use fruit to create syrups for cocktail bases. Consider purchasing lower grade fruit that may be smaller, bruised or have blemishes since their appearance will have no impact on how the syrup or puree will taste.

Work closely with your kitchen team. Are there certain parts of ingredients that they aren't using that you could use for your cocktail? For example, butternut squash peels can infuse a great flavour into syrups. Aquafaba (chickpea water) works well as an egg-white replacement in sours as opposed to being poured down the drain.

Be mindful of your garnishes. Consider whether you really need to add a slice of citrus to each of your drinks. Could you use a more local ingredient like cucumber instead? Also try to avoid using garnishes that are not edible. We love to turn leftover ingredients into powders and use them as garnishes, they can make a drink look pretty and also have a powerful smell.

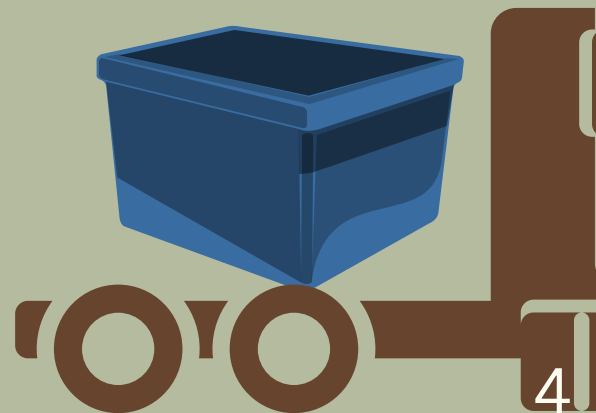
Drink Containers and Packaging

The packaging of drinks can have a large environmental impact. Try to avoid purchasing products in plastic bottles. Instead of offering bottled water, offer filtered water or tap water. This helps to reduce the carbon footprint of serving water because no transportation or refrigeration space is needed to offer this service, plus there is no packaging.

Glass bottles are preferred over plastic bottles. Try to purchase from companies that will collect and re-use their glass bottles or bottles that can be returned to the Beer Store. The best way to purchase beer, cocktails and wine is in kegs. The drinks stay fresher longer, you only pour the amount that you need, and the kegs will get re-used. Commercial pop guns are also preferred over individual cans.



When purchasing shelf stable products, if possible, purchase in bulk to reduce packaging. Small, local companies will also often have more flexibility with their packaging and may have the ability to deliver their goods in reusable packaging. For example, you could setup a system with your supplier where they deliver their products in containers each week. Upon delivery, they pick up the empty containers which will then be filled the following week.



Ordering Systems

Avoid food and drink waste by having smart inventory management systems. Monitor expiry dates on products, label your drinks with the date that they were opened and use older products first. Check your inventory before placing orders and use historical sales data to help forecast how much product you need to order. It is always better to have a smaller inventory to ensure products are being used rather than wasted.



Health-Conscious Menu Planning

To make your bar more inclusive, be sure to offer a variety of drink options. Your bar menu should have non-alcoholic drinks and sugar-free options.

Our favourite non-alcoholic drinks:

- Sobri offers non-alcoholic spirits that can replace gin and tequila in cocktails
- Non-alcoholic beer – Try Partake Beer or the Non-Alcoholic Jelly King from Bellwoods
- Proxies is a wine-like drink that is meant for pairing with food
- Hop water is super trendy right now – try Wellington Brewery
- Number E Sparkling Tea
- Gingerbug



Our favourite sugar free drinks:

- Botany sparkling waters from Collective Arts
- Sap Sucker
- Tea

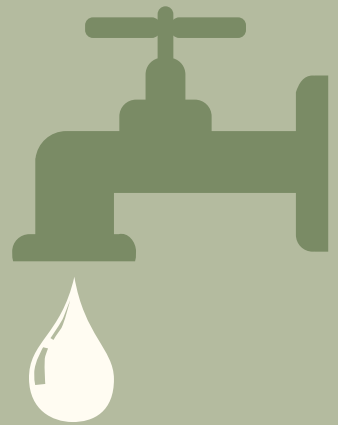


Water and Energy Use

Bars are high users of water and energy due to the reliance on equipment like fridges, ice makers and glasswashers. Be mindful of when your glasswasher is running. Quite often they will be running non-stop even if there are no glasses in it. Make sure your glasswasher has an automatic stopper or stop it manually so that it is not running during slow service times.

When purchasing new equipment, ensure that it is energy star rated so that they are energy efficient. Fridges should also have strong seals to ensure the cold air cannot escape. Also make sure that equipment such as coffee machines are not left on overnight.

Ensure any water taps behind your bar do not drip or leak. Also make sure that they have aerators in their spout to reduce the amount of water that comes out of the tap.



Manage your ice use strategically. Only fill your bar well with the amount of ice you need for your service. Taking extra ice from the ice machine will trigger more ice needing to be made and more ice in your bar well that will need to melt. If you do have ice left in your bar well at the end of the night, leave it to melt overnight rather than running hot water over it to melt it. Add cleaning the bar well to the opening duties rather than night duties.

Try to reduce wasting water by asking guests if they would like to be served water rather than automatically serving them. If you fill bottles or pitchers with water for the table, collect any of the leftover water and use it in secondary activities such as watering plants or using it as mop water.

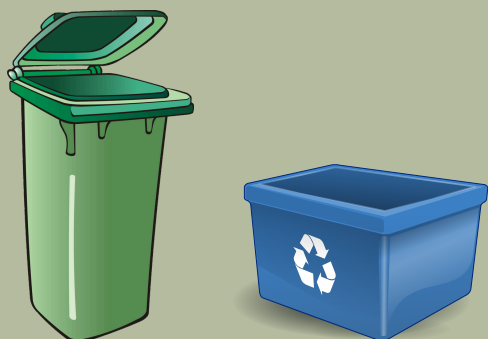
Service, Packaging and Waste

It is recommended that recycling and compost bins are located behind the bar to make it easier for bartenders to reduce waste. Make sure that drink byproducts like coffee grounds, citrus wedges and tea bags are being composted. Drink waste can also be reduced by avoiding automatically putting pre-portioned items on tables such as cream, milk and sugar. Instead ask customers what items they would need and bring them on-demand. These items should also be bought in bulk and served in reusable containers rather than offering sugar and cream in already portioned packets.

Any prepped ingredients should be kept in reusable containers rather than plastic wrap.

Often aluminum containers with lids or glass containers with lids are a great way to mise en place ingredients. When plastic bags, lido containers and plastic jugs are required, make sure to wash them and re-use them to avoid producing more waste.

All drinks should be served in reusable glasses and plastic straws, stir sticks and cocktail picks should be avoided. We recommend using metal alternatives for these items. It's important to keep a handful of plastic straws on hand in case a customer has accessibility needs but we only use these on request. It is also best to avoid the use of coasters unless by request. Often customers will fiddle with coasters and rip them up so they cannot be reused.



For takeaway drinks, encourage customers to bring their own reusable mugs or containers.

Sometimes offering a small discount or stamp card to award people for bringing their own mugs helps to incentivize and remind customers to do this. Another option to reduce takeout cup waste is to build a mug library or partner with a re-usable mug company such as [Friendlier](#). If none of these options are possible and you need to offer disposable coffee cups, find ones that are certified compostable by your municipal waste system. Canada only has a 9% recycling rate so compostable takeout items are typically the better alternative to recyclable ones. Successful recycling relies heavily on consumer sorting and isn't very reliable. Checking with municipal composting requirements, and purchasing alternatives that comply is the best bet for keeping single-use items out of landfill.

Lastly, rather than printing new menus for your service each day, use digital screens, chalkboards, electronic menus or place your menus in covers to avoid wasting paper.

Employee Training and Wellness

Bartenders and baristas should focus on developing not just their bar skills and beverage knowledge but also their knowledge of a bar's environmental footprint. It is encouraged that staff receive environmental sustainability training so that they learn strategies to make their bar more environmentally friendly. A good introductory course is the Sustainable Foodservice Professional which although focused on the back of house, does a great job at sharing the basics of environmentally friendly menu development, procurement practices and energy use. It is also recommended that staff are empowered to create green teams which allow the team to suggest and act on new environmental pursuits.



All staff should also receive safe alcohol handling training (Smart Serve in Ontario) and sexual violence and harassment intervention training.



Staff should also be paid living wages. You can look up the living wage in your area of Ontario through the Ontario Living Wage Network.

It is also encouraged to provide resources to support mental, physical and financial health. Many chamber of commerce offices offer group benefits plans. Mental and physical health can also be supported by ensuring work hours provide a reasonable work life balance. It is also important to foster a respectful and trusting environment where staff feel comfortable bringing concerns to management.

Mental health support resources:

- Mental health training from Not 9 to 5
- Mind the Bar
- Bartender's Benevolent Fund
- Healthy Pour
- Mental Health Commission of Canada



Sustainability Reporting

Sustainability is an ongoing and ever-evolving process, but it can be a fun project to work towards. All you have to do is start with one initiative today and then slowly start adding more. To be successful and gain interest from your employees and community, be sure to include them in your sustainability journey. Explain to your employees why you are incorporating sustainability into your bar so that they understand the changes. They are also your number one champions, and they can help spread the word to your customers. An important part of a bartender or barista's job is to strike up conversations with customers. Showing off sustainable practices behind the bar and explaining the reason why they are being done could help customers rethink their own practices at home. They may also see your bar or cafe as a leader.



Studies have shown that customers do care about sustainability and are more likely to be repeat guests at restaurants that care about their environmental impact and employee well-being. In addition to having your employees share your sustainability story, include it on your menus, in social media posts and add a sustainability section or report to your website. By investing in sustainability, we can guarantee that it will grow your loyal customer base, engage your employees, and reduce operation costs over time. So what are you waiting for?

Our Checklist is meant to be used as a tool to start working through your bar and ticking off areas of improvement towards a more sustainable operation.

Use the checklist to help set goals and start tracking progress, and remember to communicate your wins with your guests!



The Checklist

How to Use this Checklist

The checklist is broken down into sections for each area of your bar. Start with an initial assessment of each item in each category. Next, make time-specific and measurable targets for when you believe each item will meet the 'completed' category. We recommend updating the checklist quarterly to see where you've made progress in each area.

TIP: Use the links provided throughout this guide to help you get started

You have a plan including a timeline and targets in place and are now working towards excellence in this area

You've begun some aspects of this task but you still have a lot of work to do!

Task Item	Started	In Progress	Completed
Products are seasonal	✓		
Composting of all food scraps		✓	
Energy efficient equipment	✓		

You feel confident that you are at the highest level of completion of this task that you can reasonably accomplish in your establishment

TIP: Delegate different sections of the checklist to different staff members to empower them to find solutions in their area of your sustainability plan

Product Purchasing and Menu Development

Item	S	P	C
Products purchased are seasonal and change throughout the months of the year. For example, drinks with rhubarb in the spring, berries in the summer, apples in the fall			
Products purchased are bought from local suppliers. For example, wine, beer and spirits from local businesses. Fruit from local farmers when in season.			
Fruits and other foods bought for juices and syrups are lower grade (blemishes, small size) and are repurposed.			
The full use of food is prioritized. For example, peels, stalks and edible shavings of vegetables and fruits are used as drink ingredients.			
Swapping high-resource products where possible ie. Local fruits or vinegars in place of lemon juice			
Mindful garnishing (or foregoing garnishing) of cocktails			
Shelf stable products are bought in bulk to reduce packaging			
The company carries out smart ordering systems, inventory monitoring, inventory rotation and/or other inventory management strategies to avoid food and drink waste.			
Fair trade coffee, tea, sugar, fruit, cocoa, and spices are purchased where possible			
Plastic bottled beverages are not offered			
The company favours kegs over bottles.			
Non-Alcoholic options are available			
Sugar content of drinks is monitored			

Water and Energy Use

Item	S	P	C
Water taps do not leak, and they have aerators to reduce the amount of water used.			
The company has goals for limiting the use of ice. For example, not filling the ice well an hour before close.			
Ice is left in bar well to melt overnight rather than running water to melt it.			
Glasswasher is only operated when at full capacity.			
Guests are asked if they would like water instead of being automatically served			
Leftover water from water bottles is collected and used in activities where the use of drinking water is not required (mop water, watering plants etc).			
Bar equipment is shut off when not in use.			

Service, Packaging and Waste

Item	S	P	C
Reusable products are used instead of plastic cups, plastic straws, stir sticks and cocktail picks			
Bins for recycling and compost are placed at the bar			
The company returns empties.			
The company assesses its food waste during bar preparation and distribution, prioritizes the full use of food, producing preparations that use peels, stalks, and/or edible shavings of vegetables and fruits as ingredients.			
The company composts or reuses its coffee grounds.			
No pre-portioned drink items automatically on each dining table (cream, milk, sugar, water)			
Use of electronic or reusable menus to avoid printing new menus for each service			
Perishable products are kept in containers as opposed to plastic wrap wherever possible			
Plastics are re-used (plastic containers washed and re-purposed, lido containers, plastic bags washed and re-used when possible)			
Encourage re-use for takeaway coffees. Encourage guests to bring their own mugs, consider a mug library, or look for a re-usable program you can participate in in your area. If all options unavailable, purchase takeaway cups that are certified to be compostable in your municipal system.			

Employee Training and Wellness

Item	S	P	C
The staff has undergone environmental training (energy efficiency, water efficiency, fundamentals of sustainability). The company trains its employees to avoid food waste during all stages of drink production, from the purchase of food to distribution of the drink.			
The staff has undergone safe alcohol handling training			
The staff has undergone sexual violence and harassment intervention training			
Staff are paid living wages			
The staff are aware of resources that are available to them for support (mental health, wellness, financial health)			
The staff feel comfortable bringing up issues and know who to talk to			
Staff are empowered to create 'green teams' to take on additional environmental pursuits			