

Green Tips

By Justin Koury

Do you remember a time when green meant leafy lettuce in the salad? Challenge your thinking and find real green alternatives.

Pamela Samper of the Ravishing Radish in Seattle, Wash. explains, “Catering can be extremely wasteful.” Samper, an executive chef, stressed the importance of finding employees, chefs, and even clients who support eco-friendly initiatives. It is imperative for operations to have in place waste reduction and try to recycle as much as possible. There are now many products in the industry marketed especially for the eco-conscious caterer. Examples are plates made from sugarcane which are highly compostible, cutlery that used to take decades to break down can now be manufactured to start composting within 48 hours of use. If you cannot find compostible items, make sure that they can be recycled easily.

Here are some other ideas when considering how to go green:

- Buy/be green whenever possible
- Choose free farmed poultry and sustainably caught fish
- Try to focus on seasonal ingredients, these are better for the environment and more cost efficient
- Use a hybrid delivery vehicle
- Deliver lunches on bikes like Crave Catering in Oregon does

Buy local ingredients whenever possible to keep food miles down. Buying local means that money stays in your own community, energy is not wasted in transportation and you insure the freshest possible product. The cost saving this brings can mean a quarter in the black rather than red.

Education is key

There are many schools now implementing sustainability programs within their curriculum; Yale, Indiana University, Purdue University, and Kendall College to name a few, have courses or research programs geared toward a healthier environment. Communities from Chicago to Seattle are doing their part to educate consumers and businesses close to home, in hopes that one day a nationwide sustainability movement will take hold.

Making it easier

Mark Lopez, owner of Crave Catering in Portland, Ore. points out, “Going green can be a daunting task, especially if you are starting from scratch.” The best option is to incorporate the groundwork for sustainability during the initial planning stages. If the client cannot afford to “go green” in one day, at least have in place the infrastructure to make the transition easier.

For ideas, information and sustainability programs, contact The Natural Step, an organization dedicated to practical and innovative strategies for sustainability. Contact them at www.naturalstep.org. And to learn even more about sustainable catering practices, visit www.sustainablecateringassociation.org which is closely linked with Natural Step and is an organization whose members include Crave Catering.

Lopez also explains that The Natural Step works with companies such as IKEA, Electrolux, and Alcoa in Canada, all of whom will be taking much more aggressive action in the future to improve their impact on the environment. 🌍