

Plastic-Free Guide for Boba Shops



The San Mateo County Disposable Foodware Ordinance bans single-use plastic foodware, including compostable plastic (bioplastic, PLA, CPLA, TPLA), for drinking cups, utensils, straws, and food containers. Instead, restaurants and cafes are required to use fiber-based compostable foodware or reusable foodware. Boba shops across the Bay Area have successfully made this switch and are taking other actions to be more sustainable.

Urban Ritual | San Mateo, CA

- Eliminated plastic cups and implemented branded fiber boba cups, lids and straws.
- Partnered with Okapi Resuables to offer a rentable reusable cup service.
- Market their sustainability efforts as a marketing tool to get more customers.



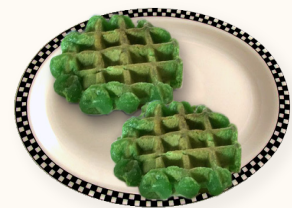
Nano's Ohana | Half Moon Bay, CA

- 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, 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 on-site, which elevates the entire cafe experience as a memorable event.
- 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. Instruct consumers to gently shake their boba beverage. Consider stirring the beverage for your consumer so that they do not have to shake it. Make a sign to remind your staff and consumers to shake gently.
- Consider using a separate and detachable lid that snugly fits onto the fiber cup rather than a plastic seal.



Signage helps promote the switch to reusables at your boba shop to customers.

Use Reusables For On-Site Dining

- Purchase reusable cups or mason jars and reusable straws for on-site dining.
- Consider applying a small fee for single-use items to incentivize customers to dine on-site.
- Purchase bus tubs and carts to collect reusables in the dining area.
- Post clear signage such as “Leave used dishes here” and “Take only what you need”.

Reduce Single-Use Items For Take-Out

- As required by state law AB 1276, only give out disposable accessory items (e.g., straws, utensils, stirrers, etc.) when requested by the customer.
- Allow customers to bring their own reusable cups, provide a discount when they do so, and advertise this policy.
- Use a contactless pour boba dispenser that does not allow contact between the pouring utensil and the consumer’s reusable beverage container.
- Consider participating in a rentable cup service like Okapi Reusables.

Reusables are Safe!

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

Need Help?

Reach out to the County’s Foodware Aware Team to help you design a custom reusable foodware model for your business.

Businesses may be eligible for funding to purchase reusable foodware.

Resources for food service businesses, including a product purchasing guide and signage, are available at smcfoodware.com.

Contact the Foodware Ordinance Hotline for help: (888) 442-2666

