3
Serving and Cooking the Food

You're going to need plates and utensils to serve all that delicious, locally-sourced food. This section will go through the best decisions you can make for your own Jewish institution and help you implement change where it matters most.

You may also wish to evaluate the pots and pans and appliances in your kitchen, in order to produce even more sustainable food at your institution. We don't suggest, however, that you go through your kitchen and discard perfectly good items. Rather, when you're in need of a new pan, or the old fridge breaks, consider making the investment in healthy and sustainable items.

Reusable Dishes—Nothing to Throw Away

When it comes to using plates and flatware at your institution, it is always better to use non-disposable, because even so-called "green" disposable products take a lot of energy and resources to produce.

Ceramics. Buying a set of glass or ceramic dishes is a good investment to make, but sometimes not always in the budget. If your budget is tight, consider purchasing used glass plates at a local thrift store (Check with your institution about their kashrut policy first, and find out what steps you'll need to take to *kasher* (make kosher) used dishes. Note that ceramic and pottery generally can't be *kashered*). If you're buying reusable plates and utensils in large quantities, try a restaurant supply store for a good bulk rate. (Try restaurantwarehouse.com if there isn't a local store in your area.)

Bamboo. Bamboo products are also a great alternative, whether they are reusable or disposable. Bamboo wins major sustainability points because of its ability to grow and spread quickly — in some cases three to four feet per day, without the need for fertilizers, pesticides or much water. A bamboo grove also releases some 35 percent more oxygen into the air than a similar-sized stand of trees, and it matures (and can be replanted) within seven years (compared to 30-50 years for a stand of trees). A growing number of companies are producing bamboo-based plates, silverware, and kitchen items, like salad bowls and cutting boards as well.

Disposable Dishes: Compostable, Biodegradable, and More

Using dishes and silverware that can be discarded after use have obvious benefits for your clean up crew. A growing number of disposable dishes are available that use recycled content and are designed to breakdown in composting facilities or landfills. Here's what you need to know about these items:

Compostable Products. According to the International Standards of the American Society for Testing and Materials, compostable products will break down in commercial composting facilities at a specified rate (usually 180 days or less). The catch: the composting facility is not a backyard heap, but an industrial-size facility that your city may or may not have. If it turns out your city does have the means to compost these dishes, add an extra bin labeled 'compostable' and set up a committee to help get the materials to the compost. More on composting and compost committees in Chapter 6.

Here are some brands that offer compostable dishes:

- Leafware / www.leaf-ware.com
- Go Green in Stages / gogreeninstages.com
- Let's Go Green / letsgogreen.biz
- World Centric / worldcentric.org

Biodegradable Products. Manufacturers may make claims about biodegradable products that aren't verified, because there is no regulation on them.

Recycled Products. If compostable dishes aren't available, recycled products provide a good alternative to plastic. Look for the phrase "made with recycled post-consumer waste" to indicate that the product is made from materials already used once (many factories "recycle" waste materials from their manufacturing process, particularly since it saves money). However, this definition of "recycled" doesn't mean that the product is diverting material that would otherwise end up in a landfill.

For recycled paper dishes, consider

- Earth Shell / earthshell.com
- Seventh Generation / seventhgeneration.com
- Preserve (recycled plastic products) / preserveproducts.com

Corn-Based Products. Some new companies are making disposable dishes from corn. In some ways, it's a great alternative to plastic, and they do breakdown in landfills much faster than plastic (which never actually fully disappears). Some of these products are heat sensitive, so be careful if you're serving soup or hot coffee! Corn-based products are an interesting development, but corn production in the US is one of the most environmentally-damaging processes of conventional agriculture. The processing required to turn the corn into plastic is also energy intensive.

At Hazon...

Hazon purchased a set of glass dishes and utensils for our own meetings and office events. Hazon spent over $500 on compostable plates, cups, and flatware in 2008 from World Centric 9 for our board meetings and office events. This year, we ordered a set of 12 glass bowls, 12 glass plates, and 45 piece flatware set for only $120. It has not only been better for the earth, but better for our budget.

Sustainable Math

Sustainable plates and utensils are most likely going to cost you more than standard products. A case of 1,000 compostable 12-ounce NatureWorks cold cups averages $0.97/cup, whereas a 1,000 pack of 12-ounce Solo cold cups comes out to about $0.13/cup.

However, the price of these products is continuing to go down as demand increases. When looking at price, it is important to keep in mind a "systems perspective", understanding the long term benefits for the greater whole—your community's health, protecting the environment, and helping to move toward a more sustainable future. When you consider the costs cleaning up landfills, an extra $0.84/cup starts to sound like a good deal! Also, try partnering with other institutions to buy in even larger quantities to even further minimize the price per piece.

No Styrofoam! Really.

You have probably heard this over and over by now, but just in case you forgot, Styrofoam is one of the absolute worst things for the environment and your health. Not only does it leach toxic chemicals into foods, it's made from petroleum, our #1 non-renewable energy source and pollutant. Further, styrofoam never really breaks down, so it ends up sitting in our landfills indefinitely. If you take even one small step at your institution, replacing styrofoam with any of the above-mentioned options is a great first start!

HOW YOUR INSTITUTION CAN USE SUSTAINABLE DISHES

- Use reusable dishes. It will save you money, and create a lot less waste. If you can, purchase used glass dishes from a thrift store.
- Use recycled, compostable, or biodegradable dishes and napkins.
- If you can't overhaul your entire disposables budget, consider starting with the coffee mugs. Put a sign next to the coffee station explaining about how the coffee cups are made, and how they can be recycled after use. Make sure to label disposal bins appropriately!
- Have markers and tape available for people to put their name on their cup so that they can reuse it throughout a longer event.

Get Rid of all that Plastic

Plastic's convenience comes from being lightweight and from its ability to absorb impact shock without breaking, which on its own merit, is hard to argue with. It comes in an endless range of colors and finishes, is pliable, and is easily formed and molded. Most would say it's a perfect material, right?

Wrong. The long term negative health and socioeconomic effects of plastic at the local and global scales far outweigh the benefits realized by the use of plastics. Its inexpensiveness is the result of a large portion of the costs associated with its life — production, use, and disposal — being put onto society as a whole.

The harmful chemical typically found in plastic items with a recyclable symbol number 3 is Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC), which leaches into food and liquids that we consume. Another chemical in plastic, Polycarbonate, which contains Bisphenol A (also known as BPA), has also been found to leach into the contents/liquids that a plastic container is holding. When you eat or drink things that are stored in plastic, it is incorporated into your body. You quite literally "are what you eat" and in this case, it's not a good thing.

Transitioning your plastic plates and utensils over to the more sustainable options is the best choice when it comes to serving your food. If you absolutely need to buy plastic plates for some reason, make sure they are BPA-free and never microwave food on them. It's hard to avoid plastic, especially at an institutional level. If this is the case, an alternative can be to re-use safer plastics for storage around the institution. For example, if you are a synagogue that receives large plastic containers of food, these containers can then be used to keep materials for pre-schools, religious schools, and for office storage.

Adapted from "Get Plastic Out of Your Diet" by Paul Goettlich

Good plastic? Bad plastic?
Find out what's what:
http://abunchofgreens.blogspot.com/2008/03/good-plastic-bad-plastic.html

Napkins and Tablecloths

Cloth napkins and tablecloths are not only better for the environment; they can also be more cost-effective because you don't have to buy new ones for every event. Investing in a set of napkins and tablecloths is worthwhile for any institution. If you don't have laundry facilities, consider starting a volunteer laundry rotation. Check out these providers:

- Bambeco (www.bambeco.com)
- Rawganique (www.raqganique.com)
- Green and More (www.greenandmore.com)
- Green Home (www.greenhome.com)

Cookware

The types of pots and pans you cook your meals in are an important aspect to think about when considering your institution's health.

Stainless Steel. Stainless steel is really a mixture of several different metals, including nickel, chromium and molybdenum, all of which can trickle into foods. However, unless your stainless steel cookware is dinged and pitted, the amount of metals likely to get into your food is negligible.

Anodized Aluminum. These days, many health conscious cooks are turning to anodized aluminum cookware as a safer alternative. The electrochemical anodizing process locks in the cookware's base metal, aluminum, so that it can't get into food, and makes for what many cooks consider an ideal non-stick and scratch-resistant cooking surface. Calphalon is the leading manufacturer of anodized aluminum cookware; All Clad has recently joined the market as well.

Cast Iron. Consider that old standby, cast iron, which is known for its durability and even heat distribution. Cast iron cookware can also help ensure that eaters in your house get enough iron—which the body needs to produce red blood cells—as it seeps off the cookware into food in small amounts. Unlike the metals that can come off of some other types of pots and pans, iron is considered a healthy food additive by the FDA. Note that most cast iron cookware needs to be seasoned after each use and as such is not as worry-free as other alternatives.

Ceramic Cookware. For those who like the feel and heat distribution properties of cast iron but dread the seasoning process, ceramic enameled cookware from Le Creuset, World Cuisine, and others are a good choice. The smooth and colorful enamel is dishwasher-friendly and somewhat non-stick, and covers the entire surface of such cookware to minimize clean-up headaches.

Copper. One other surface favored by chefs for sauces and sautés is copper, which excels at quick warm-ups and even heat distribution. Since copper can leak into food in large amounts when heated, the cooking surfaces are usually lined with tin or stainless steel.

Teflon. According to DuPont, the finished product of Teflon does not contain any of the production-process chemicals linked to health problems in factory workers. Further, the U.S. EPA says that ingesting small particles of Teflon flaked off into food is not known to cause any health maladies. However, others aren't as sure. The nonstick coating is supposedly safe up to 450 °F, when it starts to break down and emit carcinogenic gases. Stoves generally heat the pans to a much hotter temperature than 450 °F. If you're concerned about Teflon, use it on a lower heat, and replace them with one of the alternatives listed above when the coating starts to wear down.

Efficient Energy Use

Preparing and storing food takes up a lot more energy than you realize. Here are some tips for reducing energy use in your kitchen:

- Unplug small appliances when they are not in use
- Minimize the use of appliances with electrical heating elements such as toaster ovens and coffee makers
- Replace high energy-eaters (refrigerators, dishwashers, dryers) with Energy Star models

HOW TO MAKE YOUR INSTITUTION'S KITCHEN MORE SUSTAINABLE:

- Replace old appliances with newer, energy-efficient models.
- Make buttons or stickers to help you remember to turn off the lights, etc.
- When you have to purchase new pots and pans, consider ecological options.
- Consider an energy audit to evaluate the entire building's energy use. While beyond the scope of Hazon's Food Guide, here are several organizations that can work with your institution on overall greening:
  UJA Greening Guide (www.ujafedny.org/greening-initiative)
  COEJL (www.coejl.org/greensyn/gtsoc.php)
  Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center Greening Fellowship (http://isabellafreedman.org/environment/greening)