YOUR QUICK GUIDE TO

GRAB-N-GO PACKAGING

The convenience and popularity of grab-n-go is undeniable. With the hurried grind of the day to day and less face-to-face contact, these tasty meals continue to fly off the shelves at operations of all kinds. But how to-go meals are packaged is almost as important as the food itself. Understanding the benefits, drawbacks and important details of each packaging type will bring the best value to your business — and your customers.



PLASTIC

Plastic is one of the most prevalent to-go packaging materials. It's lightweight, easily stored, durable, inexpensive and can effectively protect food from being crushed or impacted by outside elements. It also seals well (hello soup and sweet chili sauce) and comes in a variety of shapes and sizes.



However, single-use plastic gets a bad rap for not being very eco-friendly and for containing chemicals that could potentially end up in the food. Quality can vary greatly by brand and type of plastic. Some containers can stand the heat and do great in hot-holding units, but others will easily melt at higher holding temps.

9% Only 9% of plastic is recycled globally.[1]

BPA FREE Look for BPA-free plastic products to **keep food safe.**

HEAT SAFE PACKAGING | Hot food needs to stay hot. Look for packaging (plastic or other) that is heat-safe for up to 200 °F (93 °C).

STYROFOAM

Styrofoam's biggest advantage is its low price point and its ability to insulate both hot and cold products well. These qualities alone make it attractive for foodservice professionals. It's also lightweight and comes in a variety of convenient shapes and sizes. The downside is its effect on the environment. The materials don't break down easily and are difficult to recycle. It can get flimsy at higher hot-holding temperatures, crushes easily and can migrate forever chemicals into food.



PACKAGING BANS

Many states and cities throughout the U.S. and world have banned the use of styrofoam food containers (some bans will go into effect in the coming years). Be aware if there are (or will be) limitations on food packaging materials in your area.

95% of styrofoam is made up of air making it a good insulator.[2]

PAPER

Paper materials are a popular choice with many operations since most products are inexpensive and lightweight. Paper containers are typically a safe and a more eco-friendly option that can be recycled (unless lined with plastic). Paperboard is oven safe (making it a great take-and-bake option), and most paper products work well in hot-holding temperatures.



ARE THERE ANY CONS TO PAPER?

Paper has limited breathing ability and can cause food to get soggy easily. Some products are less durable (can easily crush or tear) and can be compromised by moisture and humidity. And some boxes offer limited tampering or spilling protection with unsealed edges.

63% of consumers perceive products in paper or cardboard packaging as higher quality and more trustworthy.[3]



PAPER PRODUCTS ARE VERY VERSATILE AND COME IN A VARIETY OF OPTIONS:



SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING

Sustainability took a backseat to availability and cost during the pandemic, but it's quickly becoming top of mind for consumers again. Sustainable materials are typically pricier, but they also communicate a commitment to the environment "no matter the cost," and speak to the customer who values natural and renewable resources. With a higher-end feel, sustainable packaging is quickly becoming a to-go favorite.



HOW IT HOLDS UP

Sustainable packaging can pose some challenges in how it holds up under pressure. Bioplastics are continually improving on their heat-resistant abilities but tend not to be as heat-safe as some other plastics. The price and availability can also be an issue for some operations.

BPI Not all sustainable packaging is eco-friendly since some packaging materials still contain chemicals that don't break down well. **Look for a certified compostable label to ensure the packaging is safe to compost.**

74% of consumers are willing to pay more for sustainable packaging.[4]

WHAT ARE THEY MADE OF?

Bioplastics:	plant-based sources like corn, sugar cane, sugar beets, wheat and potatoes, or seaweed
Balsa:	balsa wood tree stumps
Molded fiber:	post-consumer paper products
Bagasse:	bamboo, sugar cane, sorghum, agave
Mycelium:	mushroom roots

REUSABLES

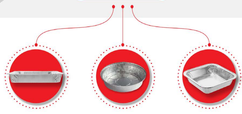
With the influx of to-go meals, single-use containers considerably add to the volume of trash filling landfills. There are a growing number of businesses offering another more sustainable solution. **Reusable takeout containers** are already an option in some cities, restaurants and campuses. Some third-party delivery services are also considering offering reusables as an option for customers.



There are many variations in how each business executes distribution, payment, materials and washing, but this trend packs a wide eco-impact and is catching on quickly.

ALUMINUM

Aluminum is a tried and true to-go packaging material that's eco-friendly, easily stored and comes in foil sheets or different shaped containers. It has an oven-ready advantage making it useful for take-and-bake items.



Aluminum has low durability and crushes easily. Food can get soggy quickly since the material doesn't allow food to breathe well.

NOT MICROWAVE SAFE

ONE OF THE BEST BARRIERS TO OUTSIDE AIR AND MOISTURE

100% OF ALUMINUM IS RECYCLABLE.[5]

NOT ALL PACKAGING IS CREATED EQUAL

Beware of packaging that may look identical to a higher quality alternative. Packaging that isn't heat-safe or made of quality materials, can melt or compromise food when used with hot holding equipment.

GIVE IT A TEST RUN

Ask for samples of different brands and materials of packaging. Vigorously test them to see what works best for your operation's needs and standards, including hot and cold holding abilities.

FINDING THE BEST PACKAGING FOR THE JOB

Weighing the benefits and drawbacks of each packaging type can help you narrow down your options. Beyond this, there are so many considerations to think about that are unique to your establishment, your menu, kitchen setup and audience. Factor those distinct details into your decision and the right to-go packaging will become a useful tool for your successful grab-n-go operation.

To ensure your menu looks and tastes great make sure you have the right equipment to keep each bite satisfying and delicious. To learn more about how Hatco can help, click below or visit **hatcocorp.com/equipment**.

LEARN MORE

Sources:
1. Chemical Safety Facts.org, What's Polystyrene?, 2021
2. IPSOS, Most Americans Say That the Design of a Products Packaging Often Influences Their Purchase Decisions, May 2018
3. Nielsen Packaging, New Report Finds Overwhelming Majority of Global Consumers Are Willing to Pay More for Sustainable Packaging, April 2020
4. The Aluminum Association, Recycling, 2021