

How To...Do a Salad Bar

With new school lunch regulations in place, salad bars are seeing an increase in popularity as an appealing and effective option for meeting fruit and vegetable requirements. Salad bars have proven their usefulness in increasing consumption of fruits and veggies. They can also be an easy way to grant students a feeling of empowerment by allowing them to make their own healthy choices as well as a way to introduce them to a wider variety of produce options.

To reap the multiple benefits offered by including a salad bar into your school lunch program, be sure to take the appropriate steps to ensure success. To assist you in learning How To make it happen, make it count, and make it successful, we have outlined some basic guidelines and supplied you with links to more in-depth information and resources to help you along the way.

Make It Happen

Before setting up a salad bar in your cafeteria, know the recommendations and appropriate methods for handling fresh produce. Start with quality produce through a reputable distributor. Minimize the risk of contamination through correct preparation techniques, food handler hygiene, and monitoring salad bar etiquette in self-serve bars. [Safe Handling Practices for Fresh Produce for Foodservice](#) or [Best Practices: Handling Fresh Produce in Schools](#) give more specific safety guidelines to incorporate into your kitchen's routine. Ensure that produce stays fresh for the maximal duration by adhering to storage guidelines appropriate to each type of product. Establish a system to record a product's "produced on" or "use by" date. Also be sure that your kitchen is stocked with the necessary tools and equipment to prepare fresh produce and maintain its safety. If your kitchen cannot be equipped or staffed to prepare large quantities of fresh produce consider pre-cut alternatives. Although more expensive up-front, these options may be more appropriate, as well as cost-effective, for your establishment when taking into account prep time and percent yield. Check the [USDA Memo Jan/2011](#) for answers to more questions.

This is also the time to start marketing your new lunch addition. Look at [Salad Bars in Schools](#) for helpful ideas on incorporating students and staff when implementing salad bars from beginning to end.

Make It Count

Salad bars can be used as either the entire meal offering or as a meal component. Self-serve bars must be positioned after the POS to ensure that appropriate portions are being taken. If the salad bar does not have pre-portioned offerings the cashier must be trained to identify appropriate serving sizes to determine if the self-serve options on a student's tray can count toward a reimbursable meal. Often using the correct portion utensil will help.

Salad bar production usage records are beneficial in monitoring usage as well as documentations for review. Finding the difference between the weights of each salad bar offering before and after serving will provide a more exact quantity for how much was sold. Dividing it by the number of students who chose salad bar can also provide a reference to see how much on average each student is actually taking. Check out the [Salad Bar Production Worksheet](#) or, purely fruit and vegetable bars, the [Garden Bar Record](#). The [Single Day Food Bar Production Record](#) allows users to write in all of their own categories.

Note: K-5 has special requirements. Self-serve bars must have all offerings pre-wrapped. Open salad bars must have a solid food shield barrier between the student and the food with a server portioning and passing over each student's choices.

Use one of these or create your own to best meet your needs. Also be sure to look at the [Guidance for a Healthy, Affordable, and Manageable Menu Choice](#) which is full of helpful tips and matches up with the [Modified Salad Bar Production Worksheet](#).

Make It Successful

Once you have all the technical steps accomplished, have fun creating and promoting your salad bar! Get students and faculty involved and excited. Consider offering samples of new items to one classroom at a time. How did they respond? Consider their input and get them engaged. Talk to your teachers about what they are doing in their classrooms with nutrition education. Resources like [Dole SuperKids](#), [MyPlate Coloring Sheet and game](#), and [PBH Kids' Activities](#) can be great tools for teachers. And look for free resources to put up on cafeteria walls. [Make a Rainbow at the Salad Bar](#) is a great visual to reinforce eating all colors of veggies and [MyPlate Graphics](#) reminds everyone to fill half their plates with fruits and veggies.

Have fun playing with combinations of salad bar offerings and plan for as much variety as you can. Include a rainbow of colors, an assortment of textures, a range of shapes, and a mixture of flavors. Using raw, canned, frozen, dried, and cooked can merge variety and affordability. Keeping track of what's on season when can be another great way to stretch lunch dollars and can also be incorporated into your cafeteria education. Check out the USDA's [What's In Season?](#) to see each season's produce.

Make sure to cook most vegetables only until tender crisp-and avoid that overcooked gray broccoli!

Also, people of all ages have shown to respond more positively to descriptive names rather than just 'carrots' or 'spinach' or 'potatoes'. Kids love super powers and superheroes; X-Ray Vision Carrots, Super Strength Spinach, and Cinderella Celery just might convince them to sample some. For older kids, try names like Slow-Roasted Potatoes or Crisp Celery and Carrots. And don't forget that when using portion cups clear containers will better display the vibrant natural colors that are appealing to people of all ages.

Keep your students and faculty excited about your salad bar by consistently switching it up. Try themed salad bars. Make it red week and point out all the red fruits and veggies on the salad bar. Put up posters relaying the nutritional benefits when they choose red. Choose a monthly fruit and veggie each month and include it in the salad bar a few times that month. Try Build a Better Burger Salad Bar or Top a Taco Salad Bar. Find these and more, as well as basic salad bar layouts, in [Fruits & Vegetables Galore: Tricks of the Trade](#).

Resources

Further Reading:

[Fruits & Vegetables Galore: Tricks of the Trade](#)

[Salad Bars in Schools](#)

[Guidance for a Healthy, Affordable, and Manageable Menu Choice](#)

[Best Practices: Handling Fresh Produce in Schools](#)

[Safe Handling Practices for Fresh Produce for Foodservice](#)

[What's In Season?](#)

[USDA Memo Jan/2011](#)

Production Records:

[Salad Bar Production Worksheet](#)

[Modified Salad Bar Production Worksheet](#)

[Garden Bar Record](#)

[Single Day Food Bar Production Record](#)

Classroom Resources:

[Dole SuperKids](#)

[MyPlate Coloring Sheet and game](#)

[PBH Kids' Activities](#)

Cafeteria Resources:

[Make a Rainbow at the Salad Bar](#)

[MyPlate Graphics](#)