

HANDBOOK: Menu Tool

The Ce4Re Project’s Menu Tool is designed to help restaurants create greener, more sustainable menus by reducing waste and making the most of every ingredient. The tool provides access to innovative recipes that minimise waste, a lightweight solution for managing inventory, and options for saving and organising your own recipes. By using this handbook, you will learn how to take full advantage of the tool’s features and understand the principles of circular economy as they apply to menu planning.

Use the Menu Tool online at: <https://menutool.circularmenu.eu/>

The purpose of this handbook is to support restaurants in integrating circular economy thinking into their everyday operations. Circular practices are not only environmentally responsible but also make businesses more resilient and competitive. While the tool and handbook are primarily intended for restaurants, private individuals can also apply these ideas at home on a smaller scale. Whether you run a large kitchen or cook for your family, the principles remain the same: reduce waste, use resources wisely, and create delicious meals that respect the planet!

The Menu Tool and its handbook have been developed by the **Development of Joint Circular Solutions in the CB Restaurant Sector (Ce4Re)** -project (1.9.2023 - 30.6.2026). The project has been co-funded by the EU Interreg Central Baltic Programme.

1. Basic use of the Menu Tool

To create your own recipes and manage ingredients, you first need to create an account. Browsing recipes (2) or using the Buffet Menu Calculator (4) can also be done without registering, but you will have access to the full tool via creating yourself an account. Once you have an account, you can log in to the Menu Tool, access its main features, and switch between the available languages.

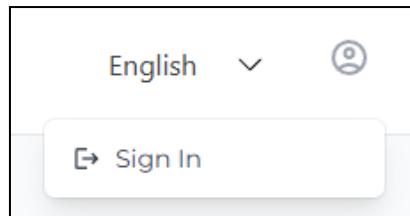
New user

To create a new user account, go to the top-right corner of the Menu Tool website and click the user icon, as shown in Picture 1.1.



Picture 1.1 User icon

After you click the icon, you will see a “Sign in” option (Picture 1.2). Select this option to proceed.



Picture 1.2 Sign in button

You will then be redirected to the Login page. On this page, click “Register new account” to open the registration form.

A screenshot of a login page titled 'LOGIN'. It features two text input fields for 'Username' and 'Password', each with a clear button. Below the fields are three buttons: a green 'Login' button, a white 'Register new account' button, and a white 'Forgot password?' button. A red arrow points to the 'Register new account' button.

Picture 1.3 Register new account button

When you are on the registration page, you will see the text “Register new account” at the top of the form. All fields in this form are mandatory.

A screenshot of a 'REGISTER NEW ACCOUNT' page. It contains four text input fields: 'Username', 'Email', 'Password', and 'Confirm password', each with a clear button. At the bottom are two buttons: a green 'Register' button and a white 'Go to login page' button.

Picture 1.4 Register new account page

Enter the required information:

- Username – used to identify you in the system and to log in to your account.
- Email – the email address where you wish to receive important information related to the website and which will also be used for logging in.
- Password – must be at least 8 characters long.
- Confirm password – re-enter the same password as in the Password field.

After you have filled in all fields, click the green “Register” button to create your account.



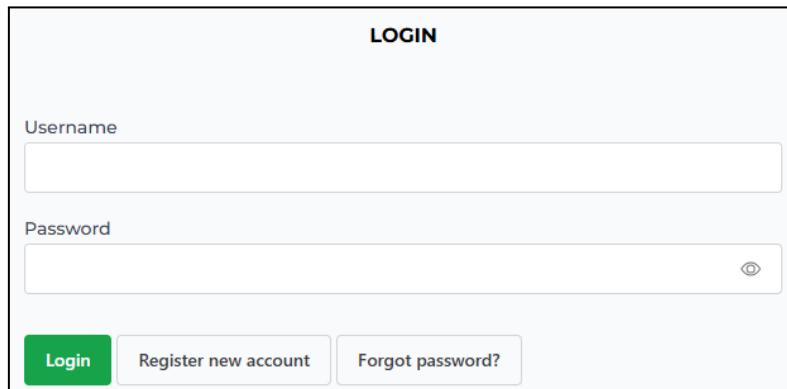
Email has been sent

Picture 1.5 Email has been sent text

Once the registration is submitted, you will see a message indicating that an email has been sent. Go to the inbox of the email address you provided and find the message containing a confirmation link. Click the link to confirm your email address. After your email has been confirmed, you will be able to log in to your account and start using the Menu Tool.

Login

To log in to your account, go to the top-right corner of the Menu Tool website and click the user icon (Picture 1.1). Then click the “Sign in” option (Picture 1.2). You will be redirected to a new page.



LOGIN

Username

Password

>Login Register new account Forgot password?

Picture 1.6 Login page

On this page, enter the following required information to log in to your account:

- Username - the username you provided during account registration.
- Password - the password you set for your account. You can click the “eye” icon on the right side of the password field to make the password visible.

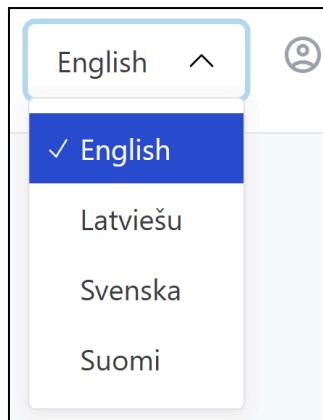
If you have forgotten your password, click the “Forgot password” button to reset it and create a new one.

After entering your login details, click the green “Login” button. You will be redirected to the Menu Tool main page.

Language

Users can switch between four languages: English, Finnish, Latvian, and Swedish.

To change the language, go to the top-right corner of the Menu Tool website and click the currently selected language. A drop-down menu will open, allowing you to choose your preferred language.



Picture 1.7 Language selection menu

2. Recipes

The majority of the Menu Tool's recipes focus on the circular use of the twelve most popular used local ingredients of the Central Baltic region according to project interviews with restaurants that can commonly have by-products or leftovers from the preparation stage. These ingredients were identified as **potatoes, carrots, red beets, onions, apples, lettuce, cucumber, tomato, bread, chicken, pork and fish**.

The recipes focus on using all parts of an ingredient, its by-products, or leftovers of dishes made with the ingredient. By utilising the possibility of changing the measurements of a dish according to how many servings it should yield, or according to the amount of a specific ingredient there is available, you can effectively find use for common leftovers and wasted ingredient parts and reduce your overall food waste.

To find a suitable recipe for preparing a dish using desired ingredients/your leftovers, click the "Recipes" option at the top of the page.



Picture 2.1 Page choice

This will redirect you to the Recipes page. Here, you can choose between the "Use existing leftovers" and "Browse recipes" options. The "Use existing leftovers" option shows you recipes that you can cook using leftovers from your previous meals or main courses. The "Browse recipes" option allows you to explore all available recipes.

Recipes

What do you want to do?

Use existing leftovers

Browse recipes

Picture 2.2 Browse recipes chosen

Use existing leftovers

i. Filters

There are two main filters. One is for ingredients and another one is more detailed.

The filter on the right is used to enter the ingredients you want to use. To do this, fill in the following fields:

- Select ingredient - type the ingredient you have available.
- How much? - enter the quantity of this ingredient.
- Unit - select the measurement unit used to measure your ingredient (e.g. grams, litres).

After entering the information, click the “Add” button to confirm the ingredient.

What do you have leftover?	How much?	Unit	
Select ingredient...	e.g. 500	▼	Add
<small>*All ingredient quantities will be adjusted according to the number of guests, including seasoning.</small>			

Picture 2.3 Filtering ingredients

On the left, you will find a field for the number of guests. After entering the number of people and clicking the “Search” button, all ingredient quantities will be automatically adjusted according to the number of guests. A “Search” field on the left allows you to search for the desired recipe by its name.

More filters	Search...	How many guests?*
Search		e.g. 50
Reset all filters		

Picture 2.4 Filtering guests number

To access the last filter option, click the “More filters” button, which you can find in the left-hand filter section (see Picture 2.4).

After clicking this option, an expanded filter section will appear:

- Courses - the type of dish you want to cook (for example, dessert, appetizer, or main dish)

You can select as many options as you like. When an option is selected, it is marked with a tick inside a blue box. For example, in Picture 2.5, Appetizer, Soup are selected.

After you apply the filters, the results will appear below the filter section. If you enter more than one ingredient, recipes that contain all the ingredients you entered are shown first. Below them, you will see recipes that match your ingredients only partially. If there are no recipes that use all of the selected ingredients, only partially matching recipes are displayed.

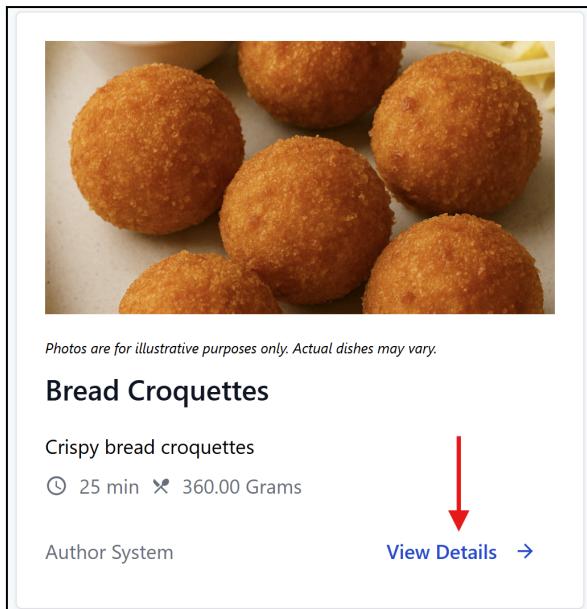
The screenshot shows a user interface for searching recipes. At the top, there are buttons for 'Use existing leftovers' and 'Browse recipes'. Below these are fields for 'How many guests?' (e.g. 50) and 'What do you have leftover?' (e.g. Banana 500g). There is also a 'Search...' input field and an 'Add' button. A note at the bottom states: '*All ingredient quantities will be adjusted according to the number of guests, including seasoning.' Below the search bar, there is a 'Reset all filters' button and a message: 'No recipes with ALL of the search criteria were found'. Under the heading 'Recipes with SOME ingredients or criteria', there are three recipe cards: 'Apple Peel Smoothie' (smoothie with banana and apple), 'Baked Banana Casserole' (casserole with banana, raspberries, and coconut), and 'Banana Cake' (a moist banana cake). Each card includes a photo, a title, a brief description, and a note: 'Photos are for illustrative purposes only. Actual dishes may vary.'

Picture 2.5 Browse recipes

Browse

The Browse view is designed to help you find inspiration by exploring different recipes. In this view, you can only use the Course type filters, located within the “More filters” option.

To view a recipe in more detail, click “View details”. You will then see the full list of ingredients and quantities needed, as well as step-by-step preparation instructions, estimated cooking time, and other useful information.



Picture 2.6 Recipe card

Create recipe

If you are logged in, a button will appear on the right. Click Create recipe to start creating a new recipe.

A new form will open. Fill in the information related to your recipe for it to appear in the system.

[← Back to recipes](#)

Add New Recipe

Name*

Recipe Image URL

No file chosen

This is an AI-generated image

Description*

Preparation time (minutes)

Cooking time (minutes)

Author*

Resulting Amount
 e.g. 150

Circularity Description

Picture 2.7 Add new recipe form – first part

Below is a table representing the form fields from Picture 2.7, namely the field name, description, whether the field is required, and a sample answer.

Field	Description	Required?	Sample answer
Name	Official name of your recipe as it will appear on the Menu tool platform.	✓	Creamy carrot-top pesto pasta
Recipe image URL	Direct link to a recipe photo hosted online.	✗	https://example.com/images/pesto-pasta.jpg
Upload image	Image file you upload from your computer instead of using an external URL.	✗	pesto-pasta.jpg
This is an AI-generated image	Tick this box if the recipe image was created using AI rather than being a real photo.	✗	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (ticked if the image is AI-generated)
Description	Short description of the recipe shown at the top of the recipe page.	✓	A creamy pasta made with carrot-top pesto and leftover roasted vegetables.
Preparation time (minutes)	Time needed to prepare the ingredients before cooking (washing, peeling, chopping, etc.).	✗	15
Cooking time (minutes)	Time the dish needs to cook (baking, boiling, frying, etc.).	✗	25
Author	Name of the person or organisation who created the recipe.	✓	The menu tool test kitchen
Resulting amount	How much food the recipe makes and the unit of measure (e.g. servings, grams).	✗	4 – Servings
Circularity description	Explanation of how the recipe promotes circular cooking and reduces food waste.	✗	Uses leftover roasted vegetables and stale bread croutons to minimise food waste.

In Picture 2.8, you can see the second part of the form. Below the picture, you can find a second table with the field descriptions.

The screenshot shows a user interface for adding a new recipe. At the top left is a checkbox for 'Make Recipe Public'. Below it is a 'Courses' section with checkboxes for Appetizer, Beverage, Breakfast, Dessert, Main, Salad, and Soup. The 'Ingredients' section contains a large text input field and a 'Add' button with a plus sign. The 'Steps' section is a large text input field. At the bottom right are 'Cancel' and 'Create new' buttons.

Picture 2.8 Add new recipe form – second part

Field	Description	Required?	Sample answer / selection
Make Recipe Public	Tick this box if you want the recipe to be visible to all users on the platform.	✗	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Courses	Select one or more course types that best describe the recipe.	✗	Appetizer, Main
Ingredients	List all ingredients used in the recipe. Each ingredient is added via the "Add" button.	✓	200 g carrots; 1 tbsp olive oil; 150 g cooked rice
Steps	Step-by-step instructions on how to prepare the recipe.	✓	1. Preheat the oven to 180 °C... 2. Chop vegetables... etc.

To insert an ingredient, enter the ingredient name, amount, and measurement unit, then select whether the ingredient is a product, by-product, or used ingredient. The ingredients you enter must already exist in the ingredient database or have been created earlier in the Ingredients management tool.

When you have finished defining the recipe, click the Create new button in the bottom-right corner to save it. The recipe will then appear on the Recipes page, where you can view it or find it later using the search bar and filters.

3. Ingredients

When you are logged in, you can start managing your ingredients. To do this, click the “Ingredients” button at the top of the page. You will be redirected to the ingredient inventory management page, where you can add and update ingredients that you want to start tracking.



Picture 3.1 Ingredients button

On this page, you can see the Add ingredient button, filters, a search bar, and the list of all ingredients.

A screenshot of the "Ingredients" page. The page has a header with the title "Ingredients" and a blue "Add ingredient" button. Below the header is a search bar with a magnifying glass icon and the placeholder "Search ingredients...". There are also "More filters" and "Search" buttons. The main content is a table with the following data:

NAME	CATEGORY	DIET & SEASON	AMOUNT	STATUS
Allspice	Spices		500 g	In stock
Almond Flakes	Nuts		355 g	In stock
Almond Flour	Grains		0 g	Out of stock

Picture 3.2 Ingredients page

Adding ingredients

To add an ingredient, click the “Add ingredient” button. A new page will open for creating a new ingredient. Here, you can define the ingredient name, category, amount in stock, low stock amount, course types and any notes.

Note:

- You can create your own categories by clicking “Enter custom category instead”.
- Low stock means the threshold below which you would want to add more of the ingredient.
- All ingredient amounts are entered in grams only.

Add New Ingredient

Name *	Category
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Enter custom category instead	
Amount in stock (grams)	Low Stock Threshold (grams)
<input type="text" value="e.g., 500"/>	<input type="text" value="e.g. 500"/>
Enter the amount in grams you already have in stock	
Amount at which to show low stock warning	
Diet Types	
Create new	
Notes	
<input type="text"/>	
Cancel Add Ingredient	

Picture 3.3 Ingredients page

Updating ingredients

To update an ingredient, click on it in the ingredients list (Picture 3.2). A new page will open. Here, you can view the ingredient in more detail and see its stock history. The stock history shows all updates related to stock levels for this ingredient.

[← Back to Ingredients](#)

Ingredient Details

Name	Category
Almond Flakes	Nuts
Current Amount	Low Stock Threshold
355 g	0 g
Stock status	
In stock	
Notes	
Update stock	

Stock History

DATE	AMOUNT CHANGE	ENTRY TYPE
12/1/2025	+355 g	Leftover

Picture 3.4 Ingredient details

To start updating your ingredient's stock, click the Update stock button located on the right, above the stock history. A new pop-up will open.

Update Stock Level for Almond Flakes

Amount*

Type*

Date & Time*

 mm/dd/yyyy --:-- --

Notes

Optional notes about this stock update

Picture 3.5 Update stock

Here, you need to enter the amount of the ingredient that you currently have in stock, its type (whether it is a leftover, virgin, or by-product), the date when the stock was updated, and notes if needed. Click “Update stock” when you have filled in all the information.

4. Buffet Menu Calculator

The Buffet Menu Calculator helps you estimate how much food to prepare for a buffet based on the number of guests and the composition of your menu (main dishes vs. side dishes). It is useful for catering, events, meetings, hotel breakfasts, and other situations where guests serve themselves.

Using the calculator supports circular menu planning because it helps you avoid overproduction – one of the most common reasons for buffet food waste.

Use the Buffet Menu Calculator online at: <https://calculator.circularmenu.eu/>

How to use the Buffet Menu Calculator

Open the calculator and enter the number of Adults and Children (see Picture 4.1).
Portion rule: 1 adult = 1 portion, 1 child = 0.5 portions.

Buffet Menu Calculator

Guest Count

Adults: 3

Children: 1

Picture 4.1 Buffet Menu Calculator guest count

Add dishes by clicking Add Main Dish and/or Add Side Dish.

For each dish, you can customise:

- The dish's share within its category (main dishes or side dishes)
- The dish's share of the total buffet
- Adult portion (grams) and Child portion (grams)

Add New Dishes

Customize Dish Proportion & Portion Sizes

Grilled Chicken (main)

Portions of Total Main Dishes: 20%

Portions of Total Portions in Buffet: 12%

Adult Portion (grams): 200

Child Portion (grams): 100

Picture 4.2 Buffet Menu Calculator: Adding a dish

Review the Overall Balance (main vs. side dish proportions) and the Required Quantities list.



Picture 4.3 Buffet Menu Calculator: Overall balance

Adjust dish proportions or portion sizes until the required quantities match your plan and kitchen capacity.

Tip: If you often have leftovers after buffet service, try reducing portion sizes or lowering the share of the dishes that are most frequently wasted, and recalculate.

5. Planning Circular Menus: Key Concepts

What is a Circular Menu?

A circular menu is built on the principles of **circular economy**, which means **keeping products and materials in use for as long as possible while minimising waste and resource consumption**. In practice, this involves designing menus that make full use of ingredients, including parts that are often discarded, and finding creative ways to repurpose leftovers. For example, vegetable peels can be turned into flavorful stocks, stale bread can become crunchy croutons, and bones can be simmered into rich broths. Circular menus also emphasize the use of local and seasonal ingredients, which reduces environmental impact and supports local producers.

Creating a circular menu is not only good for the environment; *it also makes economic sense*. By reducing waste and using ingredients more efficiently, restaurants can lower costs and improve profitability. At the same time, customers increasingly value sustainability, so adopting circular practices can enhance your restaurant's reputation and attract a loyal clientele.

How to build a Circular Menu

There is no single formula for creating a circular menu. Instead, think of it as an ongoing process rather than a fixed goal. Start with small, manageable changes that fit your context. For instance, rather than trying to eliminate all virgin ingredients from your restaurant's use overnight, begin by reducing them gradually. You might start by introducing one or two dishes that use leftover or unconventional parts of ingredients, such as carrot tops in pesto

or potato skins baked into crispy snacks. Over time, these changes will add up and transform your menu into a more circular and sustainable one.

Controlled, tailored changes are the most effective. Every restaurant is different, so your approach should reflect your unique circumstances, customer preferences, and available resources. The key is to move forward consistently and creatively, always looking for new opportunities to reduce waste and make better use of what you have.

Essential Practices for Circular Menu Planning

Inventory management

Effective inventory management is the foundation of a circular menu. It involves tracking all ingredients, prepared dishes, and reusable leftovers so you know exactly what you have and what you need. A clear inventory helps you control food costs, avoid overstocking, and identify sources of waste. For example, if you notice that certain vegetables often spoil before they are used, you can adjust your ordering practices or create dishes that feature those ingredients more prominently.

Inventory can be managed using an electronic system, traditional pen and paper, or a combination of both. The Menu Tool offers a lightweight option for inventory management in its “Ingredients” section, but the best solution depends on your restaurant’s size, workflow, and staff preferences. Experiment with different tools until you find one that fits your needs.

Your inventory should reflect the full scope of your kitchen operations. Your inventory will reflect your individual restaurant, but can include things such as

- Fresh ingredients - fruits, vegetables, meats, eggs...
- Dry goods - pasta, beans, rice, flours, spices...
- Liquids - beverages, liquor...
- Ready-to-serve dishes – grated root vegetables, bread spreads, ice cream...
- Leftovers or scraps suitable for further use – mashed potatoes, bones, coffee grinds...

Consistency is crucial. Review your inventory regularly—daily, weekly, or at another fixed interval—and update records promptly after deliveries or usage. In addition to expiry dates, use sensory checks to confirm that items look, smell, and taste as they should. This prevents serving spoiled food and reduces unnecessary waste.

To further optimize your inventory, apply methods like FIFO (First In, First Out) to ensure older items are used before newer ones. Arrange storage so that older products are easy to access, reducing waste and maintaining freshness. Beyond FIFO, you can use inventory insights to schedule production efficiently, reduce emergency purchases, and even coordinate with suppliers for just-in-time deliveries. Over time, these practices lead to smoother operations, lower costs, and a more sustainable kitchen.

Beyond tracking amounts and freshness, a good inventory should also include storage conditions (temperature, humidity, and packaging), supplier information (source, delivery dates, and batch numbers), and cost data for each item. Monitoring these factors helps

ensure food safety, maintain quality, and support traceability in case of recalls and allows you to evaluate supplier reliability and negotiate better purchasing terms. For the uses of menu planning though, staying on top of ingredient amounts and their status is the most important step.

Minimising waste

The first step in minimizing waste is to track it carefully. You cannot reduce what you do not measure. Begin by recording all sources of waste, from preparation errors in the kitchen to plate leftovers from customers. This includes food that is trimmed away during preparation, dishes that are mistakenly cooked, and uneaten portions returned from the dining room. Tracking waste allows you to identify patterns and understand where losses occur, whether it is overproduction, poor storage, or oversized portions.

Tracking can be done with simple tools such as scales and notebooks, or with digital solutions like the Ce4Re Waste Reduction Tool <https://zerofoodwaste.vidzeme.lv/#> which offers an easy way to log and analyse waste data. The key is consistency—measure waste regularly and categorise it by type and source. Over time, this data becomes invaluable for making informed decisions.

Once you know where waste happens, you can take targeted steps to reduce it. For food that cannot be reused internally, consider external solutions. Partner with food donation programs to ensure that surplus meals reach those in need rather than ending up in the bin. Selling unsold dishes at a reduced price at the end of the day is another effective approach, and many restaurants now use apps or local networks to connect with customers for this purpose.

Waste reduction also extends to the dining room. Uneaten food on plates often results from oversized portions or mismatched expectations. Adjust portion sizes based on customer habits and seasonal trends to avoid unnecessary leftovers. Offer flexible serving options, such as half portions or shareable plates, and engage customers by providing the choice to take leftovers home. Share the metrics with your customers on how much waste was created on previous days and showcase your commitment to do better in the future.

Making Use of Commonly Wasted Edible Parts

Rethink how you use ingredients. Many parts that are commonly discarded can be transformed into valuable components of your dishes. Vegetable peels, stems, and leaves can be used in stocks, purees, or even fried into crispy garnishes. Citrus peels can infuse syrups or oils and bones and vegetable trimmings make excellent stocks – the sky is the limit!

Repurposing leftovers is another powerful strategy. Yesterday's roasted vegetables can become today's hearty soup, and stale bread can be turned into croutons or bread pudding. Desserts can incorporate fruit that is slightly overripe, reducing waste while adding natural sweetness. These practices not only save money but also inspire creativity in the kitchen.

The Menu Tool's recipe bank offers numerous ideas for using these parts, but experimentation is encouraged: be curious and inventive with the ingredients you already

have. Sometimes inspiration can strike from beyond your usual culinary sensibilities: if you are looking for new inspiration, different world kitchens can give you ideas for novel as well as traditional uses for commonly wasted edible parts.

Alternative Uses for Waste

Not all waste is edible, but it can still be useful. Composting biodegradable scraps is an excellent start, but you can go further by finding partners who can use your waste. For example, coffee grounds and tea leaves can nourish plants. Citrus peels can be pressed for oils or used in cleaning products. Some restaurants even recycle waste into growing new resources, such as maintaining a small herb garden. These practices not only reduce waste but also create new opportunities for sustainability.

Seasonality and Local Sourcing

Using seasonal ingredients means cooking with produce that is harvested near the time of consumption. Seasonal food is fresher, tastier, and often more nutritious. It also typically requires fewer resources to grow, such as artificial heating or irrigation, making it more environmentally friendly and reducing its carbon footprint.

For example, summer berries can be the star of vibrant desserts, while autumn apples lend themselves to comforting pies and compotes. In winter, root vegetables like carrots, parsnips, and beets are perfect for hearty soups and roasts, and spring brings tender greens and herbs that brighten any dish. Preserving seasonal produce through drying, freezing, fermenting, or pickling allows you to enjoy these flavors year-round and reduce reliance on imported goods during off-seasons.

Favoring seasonal ingredients is not only a sustainable choice but also a way to celebrate the natural rhythm of food. It encourages chefs to explore new ingredients and design menus that reflect the time of year, creating a sense of connection between the diner and the environment. Seasonal menus can also become a marketing advantage, offering customers dishes that feel timely and authentic.

To plan effectively, there are many free online resources that list what ingredients are in season nationally or regionally. However, the most accurate information often comes from local producers and wholesalers, who can provide insights into current harvest conditions and expected yields for upcoming seasons. Building relationships with these suppliers can help you anticipate availability, secure the freshest products, and even collaborate on special items grown specifically for your menu.

Local sourcing complements seasonality by reducing transportation emissions and supporting local economies. Local products can be a source of creativity, a spark into redesigning dishes or the menu to reflect the local culture, the current season or the origin of the ingredients. It is both a sustainable, circular way of cooking, but a very attractive way to adhere meaning and value to your food for the customers.

Building relationships with local farmers can give you access to high-quality ingredients and unique stories to share with your customers. You might even consider foraging or growing specialty items yourself, which adds authenticity and reduces reliance on vulnerable supply

chains. You can also support local producers by asking wholesalers for more local ingredients to be available and buying them to show demand.

Catering to Different Diets

Accommodating common dietary needs is essential for serving a diverse customer base while minimising waste. Thoughtful menu planning ensures that dishes appeal to multiple dietary preferences, reducing the need to stock specialty ingredients that are rarely used and lowering the risk of spoilage. This approach not only improves efficiency but also demonstrates inclusivity, which customers increasingly value.

When designing your menu, consider incorporating dishes that naturally meet several dietary requirements. Vegetarian options are a good starting point, as they provide flexibility for guests who avoid certain meats or fish. Vegan dishes go a step further by excluding all animal products, making them suitable for those who are dairy-free or egg-free as well. Gluten-free choices are also important, not only for individuals with celiac disease but for those who prefer or need to limit carbohydrates or wheat-based products.

Creating versatile dishes can help you cater to these needs without complicating your operations. For example, a hearty vegetable stew can be gluten-free if thickened with legumes instead of flour. Similarly, offering plant-based proteins such as lentils, chickpeas, or tofu allows you to craft dishes that are nutritious, tasty and adaptable.

Beyond these common diets, consider how your menu can accommodate other preferences, such as lactose-free or nut-free options, without requiring separate preparation for every restriction. The goal is to design a menu that feels inclusive and practical, avoiding unnecessary complexity while reducing waste from unused specialty items.

Additional Considerations

Circular menu planning is not just about ingredients - it also involves training staff to understand and implement sustainable practices and engaging customers in your efforts. Share your commitment to sustainability through your menu descriptions and marketing! You can use the EkoGo app for free to start showing your efforts in sustainability, big or small!

Use EkoGo online: <https://ekogoapp.com/>

Customers appreciate knowing that their choices contribute to reducing waste and protecting the environment. Flexibility is key: design dishes that can adapt to available ingredients and seasonal changes, ensuring that your menu remains dynamic and resource-efficient.

Checklist for Creating a Circular Menu

INITIAL PLANNING

1. Define the time frame for your menu (daily, weekly, seasonal) and create a meal plan template.

2. Estimate the number of customers and portions required for each service period.
3. Identify any special events or peak times that may affect demand.

TAKING STOCK OF AVAILABLE INVENTORY AND POSSIBILITIES

4. Review your inventory thoroughly:
 - Fresh ingredients, dry goods, liquids, ready-to-serve items.
 - Note any surplus or items nearing expiry for immediate use.
 - Apply FIFO (First In, First Out) to prioritise older stock.
5. Assess available leftovers and by-products suitable for reuse (e.g., cooked vegetables, bread)

CONSIDER SEASONALITY AND LOCAL SOURCES

6. Identify ingredients currently in season.
7. Check availability from local producers and wholesalers; consider building relationships for future supply.
8. Explore preservation options for seasonal produce (freezing, pickling, drying).

MENU PLANNING

9. Design dishes for the chosen time frame:
 - Incorporate inventory items and surplus ingredients.
 - Use all edible parts of ingredients (e.g., peels, stems, bones).
 - Plan substitutions based on seasonality and local availability.
 - Consider customer dietary needs (vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free).
10. Evaluate potential waste from preparation and service; plan ways to reuse or repurpose it.
11. Include versatile recipes that can adapt to unexpected changes in stock.

ADJUST AND IMPLEMENT

12. Be ready to substitute ingredients based on inventory changes or supplier availability.
13. Keep recipes on hand for unexpected leftovers or surplus stock.
14. Track customer numbers, dishes served, and waste generated.
15. Review performance regularly and adjust portion sizes, menu items, and purchasing accordingly.