



THE LAST PLASTIC STRAW

Replacing plastic straws is just one small step toward broader sustainability.

By Robin Roenker

Seattle has banned them. San Francisco is poised to do so. As the national movement to eliminate plastic straws keeps gaining momentum, these cafés have found that the simple step often opens the door to other, more wide-ranging sustainability practices.

DANDELION COMMUNITY CAFÉ

Owners Cheryl and Chris Blanc have been using Vio brand biodegradable straws at their fully plant-based café and tea room in Orlando, Florida, for several years. They're also investigating adding Aardvark brand paper straws to their mix.



But their preference is for customers to drink straw-free. “We rarely hand out straws,” says Cheryl Blanc, the café’s general manager. “We have them at the tea station for people to take as needed.”

The café has also adopted sustainable, plant-based packaging, including Platewise bamboo plates and bowls and Greenware PLA-based plastic cups for iced drinks.

They compost their tea leaves and coffee grounds and work hard to portion correctly, so there’s hardly any food waste. They offer discounts for customers who bring their own reusable cups, including “Tumbler Tuesday” where guests can get a free fill-up of the tea of the day.

They successfully fought a local food delivery service’s attempts to use plastic bags when delivering their food. “We use paper bags only. Our customers would not have been OK with plastic,” Cheryl Blanc says.

And, the café has begun partnering with Keep Orlando Beautiful to co-sponsor clean-up nights, where café customers and staff, along with public volunteers, help spruce up a nearby park. “To bring it all full circle, we pick up a lot of straws,” she says.

The café is committed to staying on top of the ever-changing sustainability market. “We have to constantly keep updating our knowledge about it,” Cheryl Blanc says. “The type of products you can buy today is so insanely different than what was available five years ago.”

[More info >> dandelioncommunitatea.com](http://dandelioncommunitatea.com)

CAFFÈ UMBRIA

Well before Seattle’s citywide ban against traditional plastic straws went into effect this summer, Caffè Umbria’s three Seattle locations had already switched to compostable, plant-based straws. The same is true at their Portland and Chicago locations, and also their new location coming this fall to Miami Beach, Florida.

Danica Copus, Caffè Umbria’s retail district manager, says the cafés may eventually make the move to paper straws. But Copus feels the real success has been the cafés’ efforts to reduce straw use entirely.

“We don’t put a straw in anyone’s drinks,” says Copus. “We have them available, but we don’t actually hand anyone a



straw. They’re on the counter, and if they would like one, they can use it.”

The café has also worked hard to reduce single-use products across the board, including stir sticks. “Instead of a throw-away item, we offer spoons,” Copus says. “We have several locations where stir sticks are simply not available.”

Similarly, for onsite guests, Caffè Umbria uses only washable, reusable vessels. “We use so much porcelain and glassware in our cafés,” Copus says. “And we offer discounts for guests who bring their own, reusable take-out cups. I think as we move forward, we may want to increase those incentives.”

In the months ahead, Copus says Caffè Umbria’s cafés will continue working toward a common goal—using less plastic and less waste overall.

“Our baristas are socially aware and really involved in wanting to make the planet better,” she says. ☺

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