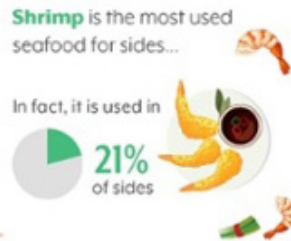


## SIDES MATTER



Operators can save on food costs by **getting creative with side dishes that feature vegetables:**



## Building Check Averages with Creative Sides

*Side dishes take center stage as restaurant operators showcase more imaginative, flavorful preparations.*

by Tampa Maid

There is an unusual occurrence becoming more commonplace — individual customers are ordering full meals made up of only side dishes.

### Sides Take Center-Plate

“Sides need to be compelling,” says restaurant consultant Arlene Spiegel of New York firm Arlene Spiegel and Associates. “Many menus are not even calling them sides but small plates. They can be starters or two or three small plates put together as a meal.”

### Top Trends in Side Dishes

Pickled and fermented vegetables also are gaining popularity, Spiegel says. “We’re seeing it done with anything from string beans to asparagus to cabbage. Often these dishes have a Korean, Japanese or even Indian flavor profile.”

### The Operator Advantage: Low Cost, High Creativity

Getting imaginative with side dishes also allows operators to take advantage of the lower food cost of vegetables, Spiegel says. “They give operators a chance to show their creativity,

and that’s not just for a chef-driven restaurant but for a diner or coffee shop as well,” she says. “Any place can have amazing vegetables. They elevate the entire dish.”

The humble carrot is now smoked or roasted. Cauliflower is pureed and combined with a garlic cream, or sliced into steaks and grilled, Spiegel notes.

### Indulgent Plates Elevate the Experience

Consumers today are looking for indulgent side dishes, Spiegel says. A successful example from 5 Napkin Burger in New York is the chili cheese waffle fries plate — waffle-cut sweet potatoes are fried and topped with chili, jalapeños and sour cream. Popular sides at the four-unit Hill Country Barbecue Market in New York include a sweet potato bourbon mash, collard greens and bacon and Campfire Baked Beans.

“No one wants wasted calories anymore,” she says. “If they are going to indulge, it may be on the high caloric end. Customers want it to be decadent and consummate in mouth feel.”