

PRODUCE TO THE RESCUE

4 Low-Cost Profit Boosters

Creative chefs are emphasizing produce options to contrast textures, enhance flavors, and help raise customers' value perception of menu items. Although some tactics may add a little to your cost, the increase can be recovered by what customers are willing to pay for the finished dish. Here are four tactics to spark your imagination.

1 USE COLORS THAT "POP"

Heightened visual appeal through bright colors can create excitement and craveability, plus allow you to charge a higher price. As always with produce, buying in peak season will guarantee both the highest quality and the lowest added cost.



- Take green salads to the next level with richly colored blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, and strawberries. The pennies in added cost could convert to dollars in added revenue.

- Accent brown foods such as meats, mushrooms, and grains with leafy greens, brilliant oranges, purple tomatoes, and jewel-toned beets for enhanced eye appeal and a wealth of flavor and texture contrasts.

- Give custards and puddings a lift with crimson cranberries, ruby red pomegranate seeds, and deep gold lemons. The novel presentation will command a higher price.



FOR EXAMPLE:

Take Green Salads to the next level by adding fresh fruits to raise customers' value perception and boost your profit!

	Portion Cost	Menu Price	Gross Margin
Tossed Green Salad	2.15	6.50	4.35
Tossed Green Salad with Fresh Fruit	2.75	8.50	5.75

**Above costs are estimates for example only.*



2 COMBINE PRODUCE WITH GRAINS

Fresh produce is an excellent flavor and texture complement for whole grains, which can be an appealing as well as lower-cost substitute for meats. Look to unusual varieties such as amaranth, faro, quinoa, and wheat varieties such as berries and couscous. Remember that customers will usually pay more for foods they cannot find at other restaurants or make at home!



- Fill roasted red bell peppers with a salad of couscous, wild rice, dried cranberries, and sliced garlic.
- Create a risotto using wheat berries instead of arborio rice; flavor it with asparagus, portobella, and parmesan.
- Use peppers for house-made pickles, condiments, jams, and marmalades – the fresh taste of house-made beats store-bought condiments for a higher value perception.



4 SIGNATURE PIZZA

It's affordable, convenient, versatile and familiar – in short, perfect for catering to today's consumer preferences. And it's great for your cash register, too, because even gourmet pizzas offer customers an economical menu choice or shared appetizer.



- In addition to the standbys (peppers, onions, mushrooms) offer adventuresome choices such as avocados, pears, radicchio, squash blossoms, and garlicky kale; complement them with chevre, Monterey jack, feta, or another non-standard cheese to present one-of-a-kind creations.
- Add fresh herbs for pennies a pie; the added taste, seasonality, and increased value perception will command a higher price.

3 SPICE IT UP!

Chile peppers can be mellow or tear-inducing, but they offer much more than heat. They can help make everyday dishes into signature dishes that differentiate you from other chefs and create a higher value perception. They lend themselves to a range of uses and add little cost in the quantities required. The same is true of spices and spice blends.



- Add piquancy – and value – to typically neutral dishes such as corn chowder, gratins, macaroni and cheese, pot pies, and pasta dishes.
- Char hot peppers and crush with garlic, olive oil, and sea salt for a spicy pesto.

