

SODA SOCIETY

Premiumisation and health are driving soft drinks stocks while water is getting rid of all impurities

The year following the introduction of the Soft Drinks Levy has seen incredible growth in the category. As expected, healthier options that not only comply with the approved sugar level cut-off but also fit into customers' perceptions of eating and drinking better have become more prominent. More than ever before, new releases are keen to stress their benefits to the drinker, whether that be through their natural character, the inclusion of real fruit juice or simply the ability to refresh and reenergise.

The funny thing about the growth of this category in the garden centre catering sector is that soft drinks, juices and water should arguably be more prominent than in other types of outlets because people are more likely to drink them than alcohol due to the nature of the garden centre visitor's experience. More often than not, visitors will have driven to the site, during the daytime, with children or grandchildren in their care, so alcohol is naturally not included. Restaurants, pubs and hotels may be seeing an increased demand for better soft drinks due to people drinking less alcohol (another health-related trend), but for garden centres, the quality should have already been existent.

"While it makes sense for a garden centre to have a small alcohol range on offer to appeal to customers who may enjoy a glass of wine or a local craft beer with their lunch, soft drinks should form the main stay of a garden centre's cold drink offering,"



says Tom Workman, commercial trader for drinks at Creed Foodservice. "With one in three adults now choosing to go teetotal, premium soft drinks is a booming category that garden centres can really capitalise on."

The point may be that, as people in the UK seem to be drinking less alcohol or going completely teetotal, standard soft drink offerings that garden centre cafes and restaurants used to get away with are no longer acceptable. The good news

"Premium soft drinks is a booming category that garden centres can really capitalise on"



is that the look, feel and flavour of a high quality soft drinks selection complements the garden centre setting – and now there are options available to create just that.

PREMIER LEAGUE

According to Frofishers head of brand Jessica Waller, standard cola and lemonade is being put in the dark by more "appealing options" that are "flavourful, healthy and grown-up." These options play with different flavours to be unique to the rest of the market, the complex flavours complementing an adult's palate more than a child's, who has typically been the target market for soft drinks.

What combinations has this led to? Thomas Bennet, trade marketing controller at Global Brands Ltd, mentions British dandelion and handpicked burdock with star anise, cloudy apple and Yorkshire rhubarb with cinnamon, and crushed juniper with Sicilian lemonade and English elderflower. What is incredibly telling from these descriptions is that adjectives, such as where the ingredient comes from or how it has been treated, can help with the appeal, as customers want to know more about what they're drinking. Being

Heartsease Farm

A grown up softie...



7 Traditional British Recipes
Made on our Farm With Real Fruit
Juices & our own Spring Water

Reduced
sugar
recipes

Available in
330ml, 750ml glass
& 425ml PET bottles

[f /radnorhills](#) [t @heartseasefm](#) [i heartsease_farm](#)

www.radnorhills.co.uk



reassured about a product's authenticity sits well with people.

As the contents have changed, so too has the look of soft drinks packaging. To portray a more premium product, we are seeing more glass bottles with decorative labels that are designed to tell a story and brand ethics, so that it speaks to the consumer.

"The current trend for botanical flavours such as elderflower and rose in pressé and cordial formats, from brands such as Fentimans, Cavston Press and Belvoir, are particularly well suited to garden centres," supports Workman. "They appeal to our desire for nostalgia while the mix of premium ingredients and packaging means that consumers feel that they still are having a treat to drink without consuming alcohol."

Garden centres can increase the premium factor even more so by prioritising seasonality and freshness – two characteristics not exactly far removed from a garden centre's core business. This may be harder to do with packaged drinks, which are generally available year-round to maintain orders, and are difficult to customise. Operators that make their own drinks from scratch, such as juices and smoothies, are more able to focus on seasonality, says Jestic Foodservice Equipment culinary director Michael Eyre. He also adds that these drinks can be perceived as being healthier, through the use of fruits and vegetables.

Whether you make your own or buy them in from a respected supplier, the good news for garden centres is that premium products tend to come with a bigger price tag, meaning that customers can end up spending more of their money with you.

However, there is a drink that we haven't touched on yet, that can be made premium, yet very often comes with no charge to the customer.

WATER WEIGHT

The talk around how water is served in cafés and restaurants is very much driven by how it is packaged – water in plastic bottles is increasingly seen as a big no-no. That said, water that is clearly straight from the sink tap in a warm glass can also leave a sour taste, so how can caterers make their water premium?

"Switching to a filtered water system, which provides water of a quality that is on a par with bottled, not only helps to boost a business's sustainability credentials but also provides the opportunity to package up their water offering – even offer it as a 'premium' water which customers could pay a smaller amount for than the bottled counterparts, or it could simply be offered free of charge as an added value service," says EquiNation marketing manager Adam Lenton.

Whether a garden centre café passes the cost of the filtration system onto the customer or not, providing water in this



"Ensure that you have a quality children's menu with a good range of reduced sugar soft drink options"

FURIOUSLY FRUITY, SERIOUSLY SPARKLING

Our range of real fruit sparklers make perfect teetotal tipples – fizzing with flavour, for courage without the Dutch.



+44 (0)1392 796610
sales@frobishers.com
frobishers.com



79% year-on-year in 2016," says EcoPure Waters managing director Paul Proctor. "On average, each person in the UK consumed 40.22l of bottled water in 2016, increasing bottled water sales volumes by 9.6%, bringing its share of total soft drinks to 19.5%."

For people who need a little more excitement in their soft drinks than plain water, the growth in the market has answered their prayers. There's now a multitude of flavours to choose from, without the over-use of sugar and sweeteners. This means that people, whether children or adults, can drink soft drinks that are healthier for them while still tasting great. Offering options that appeal to both young and old is important, because, as mentioned previously, it is these markets that are likely to visit.

"Many parents and grandparents will bring their children or grandchildren along to a garden centre for a day out at the weekend or for an after-school treat," says Almia Foods marketing manager Karen Green. "As such, garden centre caterers should look to offer a variety of tasty soft drinks that appeal to the taste buds of children while satisfying parents and grandparents by meeting nutritional guidelines."

Workman stresses that, while soft drinks have become more grown up – don't forget about the kids. These are core customers who want something that tastes good – and we all know that if the kids aren't happy somewhere, what are the chances that the adults will choose to return?

"With more garden centres targeting the family market, ensure that you have a quality children's menu with a good range of reduced sugar soft drink options," says Workman. Freshly-made smoothies not only give a healthy message but also create theatre, which customers enjoy. Frozen fruit or vegetable sachets individually portioned are easy to use to produce healthy smoothies for adults and children alike."

Based on the advice above, caterers would do well to take into account flavour and health benefits when selecting a soft drinks, juices and water offering. But, even more seriously, if you haven't taken a look at your fridges and updated your range for some time, chances are you should consider doing so.



way is surely only going to enhance their experience. Better yet, filtration systems often offer still and sparkling water, meaning that, with the addition of a selection of corals and garnishes, caterers could even create their own flavoured soft drinks range, increasing the price further at such little extra cost.

The reason why high quality water should be important to caterers is not simply because of flavour adaptations and packaging concerns, but because people do generally drink a bucket load of it – even in its simplest form.

"Bottled water sales value grew by