

Popular restaurant rating apps are missing some stars

Why did the man go up to the roof of the restaurant after complaining about a long wait for his food? Because they told him his meal was on the house. [Jokes4Us](#)

We all have our own standards and expectations on food when it comes to eating out. When you read a reviews on restaurant apps, you get a feel for how difficult it must be for restaurant owners to please everyone.

If you regularly use restaurant ratings, you're probably familiar with some of the popular ones:

- [HappyCow](#) is great when you're looking for a vegan or vegetarian meal
- [OpenTable](#) is useful if you want to make reservations online
- [TripAdvisor](#) is helpful if you want to know how travelers rate a restaurant
- [Yelp](#) is a quick way to find a decent restaurant nearby that's open now
- [Urbanspoon](#) is nice if you like to read critic and blogger reviews
- [Zagat](#) is a the app to use when decor and service matter as much as the food

Each of these tools has its strengths and weaknesses. But they're all weak in comparison to [Dine Green](#) when it comes to searching for a sustainable restaurant. I'm always looking for the healthiest restaurant around.



Hippocrates said “let food be your medicine and medicine be your food.” If you adhere to this philosophy, then you understand that every visit to a restaurant is just as important, if not more so, than a visit to a doctor or pharmacy.

If you knew your life depended on it, wouldn't you say it's worth walking the extra mile to have a healthy meal experience?

Next time you want to eat out, check [Dine Green](#) to find a restaurant making an effort to bring you a better all-around food experience while reducing its impact on the environment. [The Green Restaurant Association \(GRA\)](#) has developed the Dine Green [certification standards](#) and ratings which are grouped into seven major categories:

1. Sustainable Food

If you want to know if a restaurant is serving sustainable food, the best way to find out is to ask. But here are a few signs that may indicate the food is more sustainable than the

average restaurant:

- the majority of their foods come from local sources
- their menu changes daily or from week to week since they're serving fresh in-season foods
- they offer plenty of vegetarian and vegan choices
- meat portions are relatively small (by American standards)
- they offer organic foods which tend to have less impact on the environment and better nutritional value

It doesn't take a big staff or training team to explain these concepts to employees. Restaurants can express these values through their name, signage, website as well as their employees. But if you aren't sure, don't hesitate to ask. If they don't know whether or not their foods are organic or locally sourced, you might as well assume they aren't.

2. Water Efficiency

When it comes to eating and drinking, water is the #1 most important resource. Our bodies and all of our food sources depend on it. Like other businesses, restaurants can do their part in minimizing water waste by:

- utilizing the right technologies in their restrooms
- conserving water used for dishwashing

Current GRA standards cover these standards. But the final, and most important factor to consider is the quality of the water a restaurant uses not only for cooking, but also the quality of water they bring to your table if you ask for a glass of water. The GRA standard doesn't include this yet, but it should. I carry a TDS water tester in my purse and it's surprising how much water quality can vary from one restaurant to another even when they're next door to each other. If a restaurant has low standards on its water, I avoid going back.

[***A \\$15 Water Tester is Worth More Than a \\$150 Water Filter***](#)

3. Waste Reduction and Recycling

The US is one of the most wasteful societies in history. About 40% of the food in the US ends up in landfills. [Infowars](#). Restaurants can play an important role in reducing food waste by taking actions such as:

- offering smaller portion sizes for lower prices
- composting food waste
- donating to local food banks

4. Disposables

Disposable products make up a huge amount of waste in landfills. Restaurants can help to minimize their impact in several ways:

- minimizing or eliminating the use of disposable paper products such as paper towels, coffee filters, paper cups and napkins
- serving food on 100% reusable tableware including utensils, plates, bowls and cups
- making drinks on site instead of serving individual bottles
- providing incentives for customers to bring in their own to go cups, containers and bags
- eliminating the use of Styrofoam
- eliminating the use of plastic containers and bags
- setting up condiments to be added in house (instead of individual packets)
- cooking mainly with whole foods delivered in returnable packages or crates

As a customer you can also do your part by choosing restaurants that minimize the use of disposables. And as often as possible eat at the restaurant instead of taking the food to go.

5. Energy

How a restaurant manages their energy can be a difficult thing for a customer to notice or control. But as a customer you can look for the following things:

- restaurant is mainly lit with natural lighting (at least in the daytime)
- they offer outdoor or open-air dining seasonally as weather permits
- they avoid using heating or air conditioning whenever possible, instead utilizing shades, awnings, windows and cross-ventilation to help regulate comfortable temperatures



6. Chemical and Pollution Reduction

Have you ever thought about the fact that you could choose a highly rated restaurant on one of the popular restaurant rating apps and be in one of the most toxic restaurants in town? A highly rated \$\$\$\$ upscale restaurant that appears to be *clean* may expose you to more toxins than a \$ inexpensive burrito shop on the same street. Environmental and food toxins don't necessarily make you sick right away, but through repeated

exposure, they can lead to chronic or even fatal diseases over time. Most of the most popular apps don't take into consideration the following:

- chemicals used to wash the dishes
- chemicals used for pest control
- bleaches used in deli papers, coffee filters and tea bags
- bleaches, air fresheners and other chemical products used for cleaning
- bleaches and chemicals used to clean table linens and napkins
- indoor plants to help improve air quality
- fresh air (no smoking inside or out)

Restaurants can also help to cut back on pollution by offering bike racks and choosing a location near public transportation (to help reduce transportation emissions).

7. Sustainable Furnishing and Building Materials

A large percentage of Americans don't even question the food they're putting into their bodies, so why would they care what materials were used in the restaurant or its furnishings? Unless you work in the construction or interior design industry, you may not even notice what materials are used on the countertops, floors and tables. But here are just a few reasons why sustainable furnishings and building materials matter:

- they're much less likely to give off noxious emissions that are harmful to humans
- they're less wasteful and have lower impact on the environment

Dine Green has what your body craves. Although Dine Green doesn't yet have as many restaurant listings as some of the more popular restaurant rating sites and they don't even have an app, they're beginning to fill a big gap in the restaurant

rating app market. As more customers become aware of how hidden restaurant standards can affect their health, more people will gravitate toward apps that guide them to restaurants with more transparency, more sustainable business practices and more commitment to the health of their communities.

Some stars are missing in all these apps. We can all benefit from restaurant apps, but because of the way they're designed, some of the best restaurants may not be getting all the stars they deserve. Take [Chez Panisse](#), for example. Shouldn't they earn one or two stars for their [Edible Schoolyard Project](#)? How many stars do [Whole Foods Market](#) cafes deserve for their [quality standards](#) and [environmental stewardship](#)? How many stars does [Chipotle](#) earn for their [food with integrity](#)? And how many stars would you give [Workshop Cafe](#) for their great work atmosphere?

[Like Working In Starbucks? Workshop Cafe is 10x Better](#)

In addition to the Dine Green features listed above, here are a few more things I like in a restaurant:

- food prep and cooking area is visible to customers
- music sends out good vibes helping people to feel positive energy while they eat (and the volume is low enough that you can carry on a conversation without shouting)
- restrooms have outstanding ventilation
- pets are welcome

My friend, [Steven Wright](#), prefers restaurants that serve "breakfast any time." Last week we went out to dinner and he ordered French Toast during the Renaissance. [FoodFunnies](#)

