

Exporting salt and pepper sets to Europe

There are opportunities in the European corporate, consumer, and gift markets. Segmentation is mostly based on buying motives, ranging from a focus on functionality to fun and novelty designs. Key trends are the rising interest in home cooking, the increasingly decorative character of salt and pepper sets and their collectability. Sustainable salt and pepper markets are a currently small but promising niche market.

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1. Product description

Salt and pepper sets are spice holders that are very common in Western culture. In home decoration, they are usually classified as kitchenware. We can distinguish between shakers and grinders. Shakers are containers with a perforated top for sprinkling pre-ground salt and pepper. Grinders include a milling mechanism to freshly grind salt crystals and peppercorns.

Shakers and grinders are produced both for household and for professional use. They come in a variety of shapes, decorations and materials, usually in a matching set for salt and pepper.

Quality

Functionality

The primary function of salt and pepper sets is to season food. Pepper mills in Europe typically have fewer holes than salt mills. Salt and pepper sets increasingly fulfil a decorative role, adding charm to the dining table. Additional convenience is added in the catering market and the lower to middle end of the consumer market by offering the salt and pepper sets with spices.

Material

Salt and pepper sets are manufactured using a variety of materials. Usually they are made of ceramics, wood, glass, metal or of synthetic materials.

Design

A great variety of designs and shapes are available in the European market for salt and pepper sets. Salt and pepper sets can either blend in with the consumer's dinnerware or form a stand-alone set in terms of style.

Labelling

- Information on the outer packaging of salt and pepper sets should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer.
- External packaging labels for salt and pepper sets should include the producer, consignee, material, quantity, size, volume, country of origin and caution signs. They should also show the number of pieces, bale/box identification, total number of bales or boxes and net and gross weight.
- EAN or barcodes on the product label are common in Europe.

- Your buyer will specify what information they need on the product labels or on the item itself, such as logos or “made in...” information. This is part of the order specifications.
- Use the English language for labelling, unless your buyer indicates otherwise.

Packaging

Importer specification

You should pack salt and pepper sets according to the importer’s instructions. They have their own specific requirements for the use of packaging materials, filling boxes, palletisation and stowing containers. Always ask for the importer’s order specifications. These are part of the purchase order.

Damage prevention

Properly packaging salt and pepper sets minimises the risk of damage by shocks. How an item is packaged for export depends on how easily it can be damaged. Packaging should ensure the items inside a cardboard box cannot damage each other. It should also prevent damage to the boxes when they are stacked inside the container. Packaging therefore usually consists of outer and inner cardboard boxes filled with protective materials like bubble wrap or paper.

Dimensions and weight

Packaging must be of easy-to-handle dimensions and weight. Standards are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination, specified by the buyer. Boxes are usually palletised for air or sea transport. Make maximum use of pallet space.

Cost reduction

Nesting or stacking salt and pepper sets inside the container reduces costs. While packing has to provide maximum protection, you must also avoid using excess materials or shipping “air”. Waste removal is a cost to buyers.

Material

Importers are increasingly banning wooden crating and packaging due to their unsustainability and high material and disposal costs. Economical and sustainable packaging materials are more popular. Using biodegradable packing materials can be a market opportunity. For some buyers, it can even be a demand.

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Salt and pepper grinders are either imported including their spices, or filled at the point of entry in Europe. Including the spices adds market access requirements, as these salt and pepper sets are primarily considered as packaging for the food content.

Consumer packaging

At retail level, the more functional salt and pepper sets are usually displayed as loose sets without any packaging. If the items are offered as consumer or corporate gifts, packaging and branding can be offered.

2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of salt and pepper sets?

There are no relevant trade or production data available for salt and pepper sets. According to industry experts, the most important European markets for salt and pepper sets are the United Kingdom, Germany and France. The main suppliers are China, but also western Europe.

China mostly supplies the low and middle low segments of the market, with synthetic and glass salt and pepper

sets. European producers mainly supply the higher segments of the market. The largest producers are France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy. The United Kingdom, Italy and Spain have long traditions of ceramics production. The leading French brand for salt and pepper sets mainly produces wooden, acrylic and steel salt and pepper sets.

Tips:

Study your options in the United Kingdom, Germany and France.

Compare your products and company to the competition from China, as well as western European suppliers. You can use [ITC Trademap](#) to find exporters per country. You can compare on market segment, price, quality and target countries.

What is the effect of real private consumption expenditure on European demand?

- Private consumption expenditure is an important indicator for the European home decoration market. The sector is closely linked to economic conditions. When money is tight, consumers postpone buying non-essential items until they have enough disposable income.
- Between 2017 and 2019, European private consumption expenditure is expected to increase, so consumption of decorative products is likely to rise. Especially in emerging markets, consumers will have more money available to spend on decorating the home. Consumers in mature markets already spend a fair amount of money on decoration, so growth in their consumption will be moderate.

3. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for salt and pepper sets?

Slow cooking and dining

European consumers have rediscovered the joy of cooking. This increased popularity of home cooking started out as a combination of saving money, a revived interest in nutrition and health and a move towards sourcing food locally. Displaying and sharing new (cooking) skills has become part of a bonding process with family and friends, as well as a status symbol. This has led to a growing popularity of kitchen utensils, including salt and pepper sets.

Related to this is the slow food trend. This is characterised by consumers' greater attention to how their food is cultivated, as well as to enjoying and sharing the eating and preparing of food more. Consumers in European countries that are less known for their food culture are now also spending more time in the kitchen and at the table, stimulated by a growing number of print, TV and digital magazines on cooking and dining. This obviously pushes sales of kitchenware up, including salt and pepper sets.

Tips:

Follow developments in the food market for directions about where the kitchenware market is heading. Main food fairs such as [Anuga](#) and [Biofach](#) usually pay a lot of attention to consumer needs in food consumption and preparation.

Also follow the main brands in kitchenware to understand what selling points matter in salt and pepper sets as well as in kitchenware as a whole.

Gifting

The salt and pepper set has evolved from being a purely functional tool for seasoning food into a decorative accessory on the dining table. Design effort is being put into it and kitchenware brands view salt and pepper sets as an integral part of their overall design signature.

Not surprisingly, salt and pepper sets have become gift items, with a broad basis in both the consumer and project (catering) markets. This gift character makes renewal and innovation especially important in salt and pepper sets.

Tip:

Be innovative in your design, considering making it functional or fancy (surprising or fun shapes), novelty or classic, affordable or premium (for the true master chef). Material and techniques play a major role.

Collecting

A major consumer trend in home decoration is the urge to collect. Consumers want to have complete sets of items such as wall plates or figurines. This trend also applies to salt and pepper sets. Collecting salt and pepper sets of a certain theme, design or brand has a major impact on this category's popularity. Collectors can be quite protective and sometimes avoid using their salt and pepper sets on the table, but have them on display instead.

Tips:

Offer an extensive range of sets of different styles, as retailers want to offer their consumers a wide choice. As both the consumer and project market are an option for you, you should invest in the design of your salt and pepper sets.

Although salt and pepper sets must function well, you should focus on novelty rather than functionality in your product development. Global brands are successfully built on functionality and are difficult to compete with.

Interest in sustainability is increasing

European consumers are increasingly trying to incorporate the values of social and environmental sustainability into their consumption patterns. Their desire for a healthier lifestyle steers them away from processed food and towards fresh meals, with their own seasoning. They are becoming more aware of the environmental and social impact of their purchases, including kitchen and tableware. This gives greener options (like FSC wood or fair-trade concepts) a competitive advantage.

At the moment, the sustainable segment in salt and pepper sets is small. However, overall developments in kitchenware indicate this may change fast.

Tips:

Use sustainable materials and production processes.

Clearly communicate your green values.

For more information, see our special study on [sustainability](#).

For more information, see our study about [trends for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#).

4. With which requirements must salt and pepper sets comply to be allowed on the European market?

With which legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply?

General product safety

The European Union's [General Product Safety Directive](#) applies to all consumer products, including picnic baskets. It states that all products marketed in Europe must be safe to use.

Tips:

Read more about the [General Product Safety Directive](#).

Use your common sense to ensure normal use of your product does not cause any danger.

The [RAPEX database](#) lists products that the European Union has rejected at the border or withdrawn from the market. Check the database for similar products for an idea of what issues may arise.

Packaging legislation

Europe has specific [packaging and packaging waste legislation](#). It for instance restricts the use of certain heavy metals. Europe also has [requirements for wood packaging materials](#) (WPM) used for transport, such as packing cases, boxes, crates, drums, (box) pallets and dunnage.

Tips:

Read more in the [overview of EU rules on wood packaging material](#).

Restricted chemicals: REACH

The [REACH](#) regulation lists restricted chemicals in products that are marketed in Europe. For example, REACH restricts the use of arsenic and creosotes as wood preservatives and lead in the paints and glazing of ceramics.

Tip:

The European Chemical Agency provides useful information and tips on REACH. See for instance [REACH Annex XVII](#) for a list of all restricted chemicals. Also check out the [Information on REACH for companies established outside Europe](#) and the [Questions & Answers on REACH](#).

Food contact materials

The [Food Contact Materials](#) regulation states that home decoration products like kitchenware and tableware should not negatively affect consumer health or food quality. Specific measures apply to ceramic materials, (recycled) plastics and regenerated cellulose film. It also contains rules on labelling food contact materials.

Tips:

Read more on the [legislation for Food Contact Materials](#).

Also see the [European Food Safety Authority](#) (EFSA) for more information on [Food Contact Materials](#).

Wildlife Trade Regulations and the Timber Regulation

The [Wildlife Trade Regulations](#) restricts the international trade in specimens of wild animals, plants and derived wildlife products. This is the European Union's strict implementation of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species](#) (CITES). According to the [Timber Regulation](#), you must prove any timber used was harvested legally. Products with a [FLEGT](#) or [CITES](#) licence comply with the Timber Regulation.

Tips:

For more information, see the [Reference Guide to the Wildlife Trade Regulations](#) and the [Frequently Asked Questions about the Timber Regulation](#).

For more information on CITES permits, you can contact your [National CITES Management Authority](#).

For more information about [FLEGT licensing](#), see the [FLEGT licence information point](#).

Food safety

If you supply pre-filled salt and pepper grinders, the salt crystals and peppercorns must comply with the European [General Food Law](#) on food safety. This means they must be traceable throughout the supply chain and free from contaminants like pesticides.

Tip:

For more information on the requirements the salt and pepper must comply with, see our study about [buyer requirements for spices and herbs](#).

What additional requirements do buyers often have?

Sustainability

Social and environmental sustainability make your products stand out on the European market. Consider sustainable raw materials and production processes. European buyers increasingly demand the following certification schemes:

- [Business Social Compliance Initiative \(BSCI\)](#): European retailers developed this initiative to improve social conditions in sourcing countries. They expect their suppliers to comply with the BSCI Code of Conduct. To prove compliance, the importer can request an audit of your production process. Once a company has been audited, it is included in a database for all BSCI participants.
- [Ethical Trading Initiative \(ETI\)](#): This initiative is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. It aims to improve the working lives of people across the globe who make or grow consumer goods.

You can use standards such as [ISO 14001](#) and [SA 8000](#) to read up on sustainable options. However, only niche market buyers demand compliance with such standards.

Tips:

Optimise your sustainability performance. Reading up on the issues included in the initiatives will give you an idea of what to focus on.

Buyers appreciate a good story. If you can show that you value your company's environmental and/or social performance, this may be a competitive advantage. Consider a self-assessment like the [BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers](#), or a code of conduct such as the [BSCI Code of Conduct](#) or the [ETI base code](#).

For more information, see our special study on [Sustainability in the Home Sector](#).

What are the requirements for niche markets?

Fair trade

The concept of fair trade supports fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities. Especially when the production of your picnic baskets is labour-intensive, fair-trade certification can give you a competitive advantage.

Common fair-trade certifications are from:

- [World Fair Trade Organisation \(WFTO\)](#)
- [Fairtrade International](#)
- [Fair For Life](#).

Tips:

Ask buyers what they are looking for. Especially in the fair-trade sector, you can use the story behind your product for marketing purposes.

Check the [ITC Standards map database](#) for more information on voluntary standards and their requirements, including fair production.

FSC certification

[FSC](#) (Forest Stewardship Council) certification is the most common label for sustainable wooden products, including wooden boxes. The FSC label guarantees that a product's source material comes from responsibly managed forests. These products are especially popular in western European markets.

Tip:

For more information, see the [three steps towards FSC certification](#).

Crystalline Silica in ceramics

[Respirable crystalline silica](#) (RCS) can cause lung cancer through inhalation. The ceramics industry mostly uses crystalline silica in the form of quartz and cristobalite. Although European legislation cannot regulate working conditions in non-European countries, European buyers care about worker safety. They may demand good handling of crystalline silica during production.

Tip:

See the [European Network on Silica](#) for more information in various languages. For instance the [Agreement on Workers Health Protection through the Good Handling and Use of Crystalline Silica and Products containing it](#), a [Good Practice Guide](#) and the European national [Occupational Exposure Limits](#).

For more information, see our study about [buyer requirements for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#).

5. What competition do you face on the European salt and pepper sets market?

The competition for salt and pepper sets does not differ significantly from the sector in general. Refer to our [10 tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

6. Which channels can you use to put salt and pepper sets on the European market?

The market channels and segments for salt and pepper sets do not differ significantly from the sector in general.

Market channels

In the European market, salt and pepper sets are widely distributed. They are sold both offline and online through the big supermarkets and Do-It-Yourself outlets, as well as kitchenware and general home decor retailers.

E-commerce

E-commerce in home decoration is increasing and can help you reach a broader range of customers. Retailers often combine online and offline channels. Consumers research and purchase products online, shopping around and comparing prices on home decoration items. Small (gift) items like salt and pepper sets are especially suitable for this. To supply e-commerce retailers you must be able to work with individual packing and labelling, as well as with limited minimum orders.

Tips:

See our special study about [E-commerce in Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#) for more information.

Target online business-to-consumer retailers if you can meet the additional requirements.

Trade fairs

These trade fairs are useful sources for finding trading partners in Europe.

- [Ambiente](#), Frankfurt, February
- [Maison et Objet](#), Paris, January (main event) and September
- [Tendence](#), Frankfurt, August

Market segments

Salt and pepper sets can be placed in three sub-markets: corporate (hospitality and/or catering), consumer cookware, and giving (giftware and gadgets). To determine market segments in the salt and pepper sets category, the combination of price and value is less important than the “buying motives”.

- Functional: amateur cooks playing “master chef” at home are willing to pay a bit more for professional equipment that also looks good when seasoning food for their guests at the table.
- Professional/corporate: this category ranges from top-of-the-range tools used in the restaurant kitchen, to airline disposable sets.
- Fun: this is a key element in the giving or gadgets market. Any type of humour goes, ranging from subtle to over-the-top. For salt and pepper sets this is a well-filled category.
- Let’s play: these salt and pepper sets allow consumers to play with food.
- Novelty/inventive designs: this involves ingenious constructions or technology, and surprising ways to distribute spices.
- Merchandising: these sets are based on characters from movies, cartoons or brand names, and require licensing agreements.
- Souvenirs: salt and pepper sets as memorabilia.
- Figurines: these can be human and/or animal and made from any material. They range from precious (in silver, or design) to inexpensive (synthetics, gadget).
- Classic: this includes luxury (precious materials) and timeless (conservative) sets or those with “bling-bling”. Some classical brand names are included here as well.
- Occasional: salt and pepper gift sets to commemorate a special occasion (like a wedding), or a seasonal or other event.
- Design: designers or designer brands frequently try their hands at salt and pepper sets, which can be minimalist or expressive.

Generally, salt and pepper sets are mid-market products and are broadly spread out over “low-mid”, “mid-mid” and “high-mid” market segments. In the low end of the market, salt and pepper containers serve as spice containers (especially in supermarkets) and are part of the processed food market. At the premium end, some top-luxury brands offer salt and pepper sets in precious metals, but this is a negligibly small segment.

7. What are the end-market prices for salt and pepper sets?

Table 2 gives an overview of the prices of salt and pepper sets in the low-, middle- and high-end market segments.

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices of salt and pepper sets

	Low	Middle	High
Salt and pepper sets	Up to €10	€10–50	Over €50

Consumer prices depend on the value perception by the consumer in a particular segment. This is influenced by your marketing mix: product benefits, promotion (brand or not, communication of product benefits), points of sale (reseller positioning), and a matching price.

Shipping, import and handling add 25% to the price of your salt and pepper sets. Wholesalers account for a further 100% markup. Finally, retailers may add another 100–150% to the price.

Tips:

The value perception of your product in the chosen segment determines its price. The quality and price of your baskets and boxes must match what is expected in your chosen target segment. To determine your price, study consumer prices in your target segment and adjust your cost accordingly.

Understand your segment. Offer a correct marketing mix to meet consumer expectations. Adapt your business model to your position in the market.

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