

Exporting wooden salad sets to Europe

Wooden salad sets are popular with consumers in mature European markets, and every major department store has them on offer. In emerging markets, the market for wooden salad sets is small in volume, and functional values dominate. Imports from developing countries are on the rise, offering interesting opportunities for developing country suppliers. China is Europe's largest supplier of wooden salad sets meaning that you have to offer added value in order to compete against Chinese imports, which focus on the low-end market.

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1. Product description

Salad sets consist of a bowl and a set of servers. They are categorised under kitchenware or serveware.

Retailers generally offer the servers and bowls separately, although they also come in sets. This lets consumers "mix and match" and allows bowls to be multi-functional. They can be used for salads, but also as fruit bowls or mixing bowls, depending on size and material. Servers have also become a gift item, and consumers often own extra pairs. As a result, separate marketing makes sense.

This study focuses on wooden salad sets and uses the following codes to indicate trade:

Table 1: Product codes

Harmonised System (HS)	Prodcom	Description
4419 00	16 29 12 00	Tableware and kitchenware, of wood

A wooden salad bowl or set of servers is usually a bit pricier than items in industrially applied materials such as ceramics or plastics. Roughly one in ten bowls and servers at retail level in mature markets is a wooden bowl. Some retailers will have more, depending on their positioning (emphasising "natural", "hand-made" or sustainable).

Quality

Functionality

For salad sets, quality primarily links to functionality. Food safety is a major issue, especially in wood. Your wooden items must be safe to come into contact with food. Generally, a vegetable oil is applied to ensure this. Sometimes, a wood species' natural antiseptic qualities are highlighted (like oak). Lacquering seals the wood and prevents direct contact with the natural state of the wood. Since this natural state is a major selling point, lacquering is not advisable.

Functionality also relates to user-friendliness. A bowl needs to be big and wide enough to present a dinner salad. Standard salad bowls are generally 11 to 13 cm high and 27 to 23 cm wide. Servers are usually 30 cm long. Much larger or smaller servers can make a “statement”, but are often less practical in use.

Material

Wooden salad sets come in a great variety of European and tropical woods, such as ash, beech, oak, rubberwood, teak and olive wood. Consumers enjoy the grain and colouration of the wood itself. The perceived value (rarity, origin) of the wood largely determines the price of the bowl.

The salad sets can be produced by hand or with the help of simple power tools. Combined with natural variations in the wood grain, this means items may differ slightly. You should make the importer aware that deviations can occur and provide a bandwidth for this.

Design

A nice bowl and servers are a real eye-catcher on the table and consumers make a considered choice, both in buying and giving. Wooden salad sets are relatively undecorated to show the character of the wood as the main feature, especially bowls.

Design value also comes from the technical mastery in making the bowls and servers: hand-carved from one piece is generally more appreciated than veneering or laminating. But even that depends on how well it was done. A combination of materials in one piece, provided this is well done, is also greatly appreciated and can take the items to higher price brackets.

Bowls may deviate from standard sizes and play with height and diameter to change the look. Some taper more from a smaller base, others are rounder or more organic. Salad servers are generally more innovative in shape and form, deviating from the standard “spoon and fork” shapes. The novelty of the design and the value provided by the brand influence the price of salad servers.

Durability

Retailers greatly appreciate it when you provide detailed specifications about your wooden salad sets, including type of wood, exact size, and a logical description. Other important information includes whether the product is dishwasher, microwave and/or oven-safe. Generally, wooden salad sets should be hand-washed and dried with a damp cloth to avoid cracks, mould, etc. and to prevent rapid deterioration.

Labelling

- Information on the outer packaging of wooden salad sets should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer.
- External packaging labels for wooden salad 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 wooden salad 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 wooden salad 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 wooden salad 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.

Mould prevention

Wooden salad sets can mould or crack, so you need to properly dry the wood after production. Condensation inside the container during transport can cause mould, due to humid air becoming colder at night and warmer during the day. You need proper air ventilation inside the container to prevent this. Before shipment, you must inspect containers for air holes. You can also place products to reduce humidity amongst the cargo. Make sure to follow the importer’s instructions.

Consumer packaging

Wooden salad bowls are usually not tagged at retail level, except for product brands. In that case, the importer will print tags and send them to you to add to the products during packing. Tags can also be printed and produced in the country of origin, usually based on an example sent by the importer. Salad servers are tagged more often than bowls, as they are more often purchased as gifts. Any additional information adds to the attractiveness of the gift.

The importer usually designs attractive consumer packaging to reflect the brand identity. Both bowls and servers are usually supplied without packaging to add to the natural effect of the product. Occasionally some form of gift-wrapping is offered, like a box for servers. Showing your buyer you can also take care of packaging may give you a competitive advantage.

2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of wooden salad sets?

European imports of wooden tableware and kitchenware are steadily increasing, with the majority sourced from developing countries. Germany and the United Kingdom are Europe’s main importers of wooden tableware and kitchenware, with strong imports from developing country suppliers. The Netherlands is also an interesting target market.

Note that since no specific trade data are available for salad sets, these statistics cover wooden tableware and kitchenware.

Where is consumer demand?

- European demand for wooden tableware and kitchenware increased in this period. With an average annual growth rate of 10% it reached €323 million in 2016.
- Demand is highest in Italy at €81 million. France and the United Kingdom follow with €48 million each.

What is the role of European production in supplying European demand?

- Europe's demand for wooden tableware and kitchenware is higher than its production. This drives the need for imports, making Europe an interesting market.
- European production of wooden tableware and kitchenware also increased between 2012 and 2016. With an average annual growth rate of 15%, it reached €144 million in 2016.
- Italy is responsible for 50% of European tableware and kitchenware production, followed by Poland and Romania with 15% and 9.4% respectively.

3. Which countries are most interesting in terms of imports from developing countries?

- European imports of wooden tableware and kitchenware increased from €264 million in 2012 to €398 million in 2016. This resulted in an average annual growth rate of 11%.
- In the coming years, European imports are expected to keep growing moderately.
- Developing countries are Europe's main source of wooden tableware and kitchenware. They supply 59% of European imports, amounting to €235 million. This share is predicted to be fairly stable in the coming years.
- In reality, much of the imports of wooden tableware and kitchenware from western European countries are re-exported products manufactured in developing countries.
- Germany is Europe's leading importer of wooden tableware and kitchenware by far, at €88 million in 2016. The United Kingdom follows at €60 million.
- Germany and the United Kingdom also lead in imports from developing countries. They source 67% (Germany) and 79% (UK) of their wooden tableware and kitchenware from developing country suppliers. The Netherlands also has a particularly strong market for developing country imports, accounting for 74%.
- The strong performance of developing country suppliers in Germany and the United Kingdom is further evidenced by their increase between 2012 and 2016, by €21 million and €14 million respectively. In the Netherlands these imports also increased, by €7.1 million.
- China dominates European wooden tableware and kitchenware imports, with 47% in 2016. Other leading developing country suppliers are Vietnam (3.1%), Thailand (2.9%), India (1.9%) and Tunisia (1.4%).

Tips:

Study your options in Germany, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Their strong imports from developing countries make them especially interesting markets.

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

What role does export play in supplying European demand?

- European exports of wooden tableware and kitchenware consist mainly of trade within Europe.
- Germany (€54 million) is Europe's leading tableware and kitchenware exporter, followed by the Netherlands (€22 million) and Poland (€21 million).

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. This means that 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.

4. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for wooden salad sets?

Increased interest in cooking skills

Kitchenware is generally trendy and consumers are not holding back in spending on cookware and dinnerware. In mature markets, "experience" has become more important to consumers than luxury per se. Home cooks enjoy learning how to cook and gain respect by showing off their skills.

Cooking has also become a social event with friends and family in western and northern European markets. Amateur cooks playing "master chef" at home prefer tools that are more expressive and expensive than everyday cookware. This includes wooden salad bowls and servers.

Tip:

Follow trends in the food market. How people cook and dine provides welcome clues for kitchenware and serveware. Major food trade fairs such as [Anuga](#) and [Biofach](#) usually communicate such food trends.

European consumers prefer options

European consumers want to show their good and individual taste in their interiors, including what they put on the table. In salad sets, they express their individuality by "mixing and matching". Consumers usually do not buy bowls and servers in sets, or in the same material or style. They prefer to combine, for example, a stainless steel bowl with a fine olivewood set of servers.

Tips:

Offer choice, to allow consumers to develop their own, personal collections.

Consider your strategic options in range development and positioning. If you specialise in processing particular wood types, consider marketing complete tableware concepts including salad sets, plates, et cetera. If your core is kitchenware in various materials, you could develop salad bowls and servers in a variety of looks and styles.

Follow developments in the market for salad sets of other materials. This will allow you to anticipate possible new directions in use and design.

Consider investing in product development or a partnership with a European producer or designer. Co-creation between producers, retailers and marketers can increase your opportunities in the market.

Replacing or collecting

Replacement is a constant trend in salad bowls and servers. With so many options in materials, the appearance of a new design in another material can easily shorten the lifecycle a wooden item.

At the same time, collecting is also a strong trend in home decoration. Consumers collect salad servers and use them depending on their mood or on the occasion. So, where they may possess just one or two salad bowls, consumers usually have several pairs of servers. This is also caused by the fact that servers are ideal gifts, so people can end up with numerous servers in their kitchen drawer. Bowls, on the other hand, are less often gifted.

Tips:

Make sure your servers have a fast life cycle, with constant product renewal, to keep pace with the replacement trend. Bowls can have a slower life cycle.

Consider gift-packaging ideas for salad servers, ranging from simple strings, to pouches or boxes.

Combining materials

At product level, a strong trend in mature markets is to combine materials to add value and achieve a higher price level. Examples include combinations of wooden servers with a stainless steel tip, as well as bowls combining wood and glass, or bamboo and ceramics. Along the same lines, there are innovations combining hand-made and industrial processes. These types of combinations are a way to move up towards higher price points.

Tip:

Innovate by combining materials and/or hand-made and mechanised processes. Since this is hard to do, it will also give you a competitive edge.

Interest in sustainability is increasing

The continuing eco trend is also visible in wooden salad sets. As seen in other home categories using wood and natural materials, environmental considerations are increasingly part of consumer choice. They provide options for differentiation. Although environmental and social aspects do not immediately affect the price of wooden salad sets, and specific communication of the added value remains indirect, there is a substantial market for green options, especially in the higher segments.

Related to this is the strong trend in Europe to buy local. This trend is clear in food as well as home decoration. Wooden salad items are also produced in Europe and with locally available wood species. This can influence buying efforts by European brands and stimulate the replacement of imports by local products.

Tips:

The fair-trade market has traditionally been strong in offering salad servers and bowls in wood and other natural materials. You can source European fair-trade importer-wholesalers through associations and trade fairs, as well as online.

Clearly communicate the added value of your “green” alternatives to the importer, to ensure that the message comes across at retail level.

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

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

5. With which requirements must wooden salad 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 wooden salad sets. 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.

Tip:

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.

Tip:

The European Chemical Agency provides useful information and tips on REACH. See for instance [REACH Annex XVIII](#) 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 must not negatively affect consumer health or food quality. 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, contact your [National CITES Management Authority](#).

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

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 that make or grow consumer goods.

You can use standards such as [ISO 14001](#) and [SA 8000](#) 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 salad sets 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 salad sets. 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](#).

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

6. What competition do you face on the European wooden salad sets market?

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

7. Which channels can you use to put wooden salad sets on the European market?

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

Market channels

In the European market, wooden salad sets are widely distributed. They are sold both offline and online through the big supermarkets, garden centres 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 salad servers are especially suitable for this. To supply e-commerce retailers you must be able to work with individual packing and labelling, as well as 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

The following 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

In segmenting the market for salad sets, the lower end consists of industrially made mass items usually in inexpensive materials, particularly synthetics. The use of wood automatically sets the wooden salad sets slightly above the real, “mass”, lower end.

The more precious the wood types and the higher the level of craftsmanship (for example hand-carved from one piece rather than veneered or laminated), the more the salad sets creep up towards higher value segments. Segmentation of wooden salad sets therefore starts from mid-low, includes a healthy mid-mid and can also find

expression in exclusive, premium offers.

8. What are the end-market prices for wooden salad sets?

Table 2 gives an overview of the prices of wooden salad sets in the low, middle and high market segments.

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices of wooden salad sets

	Lower Middle Market	Mid-Mid to Mid-High	Premium
Wooden salad bowls	Up to €30	€30-80	Over €80
Wooden salad servers (pair)	Up to €10	Up to €30	Over €30

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 wooden salad 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 wooden salad sets 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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