

Exporting wooden trays to Europe

The European market for wooden tableware and kitchenware is growing considerably. This offers you good opportunities, as more than half of European imports originate from developing countries. The middle and higher-end segments are the most promising. To supply these segments, your trays must be both functional and decorative. Craftsmanship, innovative design and use of materials, and added functionality add value to your trays.

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1. Product description

Trays are classified under kitchen accessories and/or tableware, depending on how retailers have structured their categories and products groups. This group further holds items such as salt and pepper sets, bowls and baskets for the kitchen.

Most synthetic trays are machine-made and mass-produced in China or Europe. These producers are generally too difficult to compete with for you in terms of price and volume. Wooden cutting boards offer you the best opportunities, so this study focuses on wooden trays. It uses the following codes to indicate trade:

Table 1: Product codes

| Harmonised System (HS) | Prodcom | Description |
|------------------------|----------|--|
| 4419 00 | 16291200 | Tableware and kitchenware made of wood |

Quality

Functionality

Functionality is a basic quality requirement for trays. They are mainly used to carry and serve food and drinks around the house. This requires them to be sturdy but easy to carry, and to have an upright edge that prevents items from dropping. In addition, trays are increasingly used as a static platform for displaying home accessories. This type of tray can be larger and heavier and have detachable legs.

Size

A common size for serving trays is 27 cm wide x 31 cm deep x 3 cm high, or for a larger format 35x50x3 cm. They should not weigh over 2 kg. These limitations do not apply to trays used to decorate the home.

Material

Wood, in different varieties and in diverse techniques such as laminated or veneered, is traditionally the preferred material for trays. This is often combined with metals such as aluminium as a style element.

The choice of wood in cutting boards is almost endless, from European or American native species to exotics, from hardwood to softwood. The choice is determined by durability (hardwood deteriorates less quickly) and look (olive wood has an expressive grain).

Design

Especially for serving trays, a rectangular shape is the norm. Other shapes make the tray more expressive and add decorative value, even to the extent that the shape may compromise the functionality. Much design effort is devoted to the handles or grips of the tray, both for functionality and aesthetic value.

Durability

Wooden trays should generally be wiped clean with a dry or damp cloth. To prevent deterioration, the wood can be waxed, oiled or sealed with a varnish. Retailers greatly appreciate it when you provide detailed specifications about your trays, including type of wood, exact size, a logical description and whether the product is dishwasher-safe.

Labelling

- Information on the outer packaging of wooden trays should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer.
- External packaging labels for wooden trays should include: 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 trays 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 trays minimises the risk of damage by shocks. How an item is packaged for export depends on how easily it can be damaged. Packaging should make sure 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. For this reason, packaging 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. You have to maximise pallet space.

Cost reduction

Trays are usually flat surfaces, which facilitates effective packing and as such reduces costs. If grips or loops are added, keep them in the horizontal plane to maximise the space in your cartons and container. While packaging 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 packaging materials can be a market opportunity. For some buyers, it can even be a demand.

Mould prevention

Wooden trays can mould or crack, so you need to dry the wood properly after production. Condensation inside the container during transport can cause mould because of 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

Consumer packaging for trays adds value to the product in the form of branding. Instead of gift-wrapping, a tag with some background information on the item or brand adds value.

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

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 a strong presence of developing country suppliers. The Netherlands is also an interesting target market.

(!) Because no specific trade data are available for trays, these statistics cover wooden tableware and kitchenware.

Where is consumer demand located?

- European demand for wooden tableware and kitchenware increased between 2012 and 2016. 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.

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 corresponds to 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 stay fairly stable in the coming years.

- In reality, many of the exports of wooden tableware and kitchenware from Western European countries are re-exports of products manufactured in developing countries.
- Germany is Europe's leading importer of wooden tableware and kitchenware by far, with €88 million in 2016. The United Kingdom follows with €60 million.
- Germany and the United Kingdom are also leading when it comes to imports from developing countries. They source 67% (Germany) and 79% (the United Kingdom) 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 evidenced further 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 of products from developing countries make them especially interesting markets.

Compare your products and company to the strong competition from China, as well as 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.

3. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for wooden trays?

Increased interest in kitchenware

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 in itself. Home cooks enjoy learning how to cook and gain respect by showing their skills. Cooking has become a social event with friends and family. Amateur cooks playing 'master chef' at home prefer tools that are more expressive, and expensive, than everyday cookware.

This trend has also upgraded and broadened the appeal of the tray, which has long been a purely functional

item. Today, the wooden tray has acquired expressive qualities. Its added value is based on both additional functionality (supreme performance) and emotionality. This allows the tray to reach mid-high and premium segments and appeal to consumers with different buying motives, such as trendiness or premium craftsmanship.

You can create additional functionality through, for example:

- greater ergonomics – better grip, good dimensions and weight;
- clever solutions for the edge of the tray, preventing items from dropping;
- solutions for cleansing – such as varnishing, waxing, oiling, anti-slip coating.

Greater emotionality can come from:

- craftsmanship – techniques such as hand-carving, inlay, beautiful joinery;
- material – special wood types or other beautiful materials, such as marble, glass, metal or woven natural fibres, or combinations of materials;
- novelty shapes – any deviation away from the rectangular;
- decorative value (colour, patterns).

Functionality and aesthetic value are often combined. Adding emotional value sometimes reduces the purely functional quality, most often in premium segments where consumers typically worry more about the look of the item than about whether it can go into the dishwasher.

Tips:

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

You can tap into more than one buyer motive, but always be clear what ‘story’ you are telling. One motive, one product – never mix.

Nature in the home

Another mature-market trend is the desire to be close to nature, even when living in cramped urban apartments. This has increasingly led European consumers to prefer natural materials in tableware and in kitchenware as well as in categories such as basketry and furniture. Wood brings the look, feel and even smell of nature into the home. An important selling point of a wooden tray is that it is a chunk of nature.

In line with this, handmade techniques or finishes add extra value. This makes wood a popular material for trays, ranging from functional and inexpensive types in low-end segments to exclusive and expressive wood types (like olive wood) in high-end segments.

Tips:

Avoid sealing the wood, especially with varnish. Instead, use vegetable oils and waxes that still allow direct contact with the wood and prevent stains.

Communicate the type of wood you are using, its origin and properties, to provide your reseller with additional selling points.

Experiment with wood techniques and the combination of natural materials, to distinguish yourself from the competition.

Interest in sustainability is increasing

Sustainability is a continuing trend on the European home decoration market, including in kitchenware and tableware. Green values give the consumer status and may give you a competitive advantage. Wooden trays fit in well with this trend. Manufacturers can improve sustainability through the purchase and use of renewable raw materials, socially and environmentally friendly production, distribution that limits its footprint, and design that prolongs the durability of the item and allows sustainable disposal.

So far, sustainability in trays has been limited to offers with certified and recycled wood. Given the increasing interest in sustainability, 'green' and/or fair trade trays are just waiting to happen. This could be a good opportunity to become an early adopter and create an early-mover advantage.

Tips:

Specify and communicate the added value of your 'green' alternative clearly to the importer, to ensure that the message comes across at the retail level.

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

Solutions for small spaces

Another major trend is consumers' need to declutter their homes, save space and use accessories flexibly – for more purposes and in more spaces. This has had a great effect on the design of trays.

Examples are:

- space saving – nesting trays
- multi-purpose – trays that can function as a place holder, organiser, or storage space
- clever storage solutions
- integrated furniture accessories – making the tray into a side table
- eye-catcher – a beautiful home accessory in its own right that can be displayed permanently

Tips:

Help the consumer keep the house tidy and save space. Obtain inspiration from other categories such as storage, office items, or furniture. Cross-category combinations often lead to innovations.

Also apply your space-saving ideas on the project market (catering, hospitality), which has similar needs and is booming. The marketing mix (product features, pricing, distribution and communication) for this is different from the one on the consumer market.

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

4. What requirements should wooden trays comply with to be

allowed on the European market?

What legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply with?

General product safety

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

Tips:

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

Also 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](#). Among other things, it 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 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](#).

Wildlife Trade Regulations and the Timber Regulation

The [Wildlife Trade Regulations](#) restrict 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](#) license 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](#).

What additional requirements do buyers often have?

Sustainability

Social and environmental sustainability make your products stand out on the European market. Think of 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](#) 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. You can do this, for instance, with a self-assessment like the [BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers](#), or a code of conduct such as the [BSCI Code of Conduct](#) and 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 trays 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 trays. The FSC label guarantees that a product's source material comes from responsibly managed forests. These products are especially popular on 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](#).

5. What competition do you face on the European wooden trays market?

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

6. Through what channels can you put wooden trays on the European market?

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

Market channels

Wooden trays are widely distributed on the European market. They are sold both offline and online through the big supermarkets, garden centres and department stores, 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 trays are especially suitable for this. To supply e-commerce 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

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

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

Market segments

First and foremost, wooden trays are functional accessories. As such, they are popular in the lower segments of the market, where value for money counts. These consumers are looking for an everyday basic with limited emotional value. They may not even consciously opt for wood, as they are often less aware of materials and the exact material is not communicated. One-stop shops such as supermarkets, garden centres and retail chains are the main distribution channels.

Mid-market consumers generally prefer their kitchenware to be a bit more trendy. Elements such as playfulness and the decorative aspect of the tray generally are key factors. Trays should be fun and add to the atmosphere of the home, but both design and price must remain accessible. Besides wood, common materials in this segment are melamine and other synthetics or composites. These trays are available from department stores and kitchen specialists.

In the higher segments, craftsmanship (such as marquetry) and innovative design (shape, construction) are important. Branding also adds value. These trays are status buys that show the owner's good taste, making them less price-sensitive. Wood competes with other premium materials, such as marble, copper, brass and leather. High-end department stores, brand and boutique shops, and online stores sell such trays.

In the lower-end segments, distributors on the project market play a major role. This market is dominated by industrialised producers, especially from China, making it a hard segment for you to compete in. However, the mid-market segments are quite accessible if you have sufficient design capability and production capacity. If you offer special materials and techniques and can work with medium-sized order volumes, higher segments are also suitable.

7. What are the end-market prices for wooden trays?

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

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices of cutting boards

| | Low-end | Middle-end | High-end |
|-----------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|
| Wooden cutting boards | Up to €20 | €20-€55 | €55 onwards |

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 trays. Wholesalers account for a further 100% mark-up. Finally, retailers may add another 100-150% to the price.


Tip:


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


Understand your segment. Offer a correct marketing mix to meet consumer expectations and adapt your business model to your position on the market.

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