Menu costing: what your vegetables cost per plate.



THE SHORT ANSWER

Cost a dish by adding up what each ingredient costs in the amount one portion uses, priced per usable kilo after peeling and trimming, not per kilo bought. Divide the plate cost by the menu price to get your food cost percentage, and re-cost whenever produce prices move, which in Nairobi can be every week.

Why per-plate cost matters

A menu price set once and left alone slowly stops paying for itself. Vegetable prices in Nairobi move with the seasons and the rains, sometimes week to week, and a dish that made money in one month can lose it in the next without anyone noticing. Knowing what each plate costs is how you notice.

Step 1: write a recipe card for each dish

For each dish, write down every ingredient and how much one batch uses, and how many portions the batch makes. Use the unit you buy in: kilos for tomatoes and onions, bunches for sukuma and dhania, pieces for pineapple and cabbage. If your cooks work by eye, weigh one batch while they make it.

Step 2: price the usable kilo, not the bought kilo

Most costing mistakes happen here. You pay for the whole kilo, but you only cook what is left after peeling, trimming and sorting.

> Cost per usable kilo = price per kilo ÷ usable share

For example, if onions are KSh 165 a kilo and your kitchen loses 10% in peeling, the usable share is 90% and each usable kilo costs KSh 165 ÷ 0.9, about KSh 183. Weigh your own produce before and after prep a few times to find your real figures; they depend on your cuts, your staff and the quality you buy. That last point is why the cost of a market run is often higher than it looks.

For bunches and pieces, the units guide explains how to compare and convert.

Step 3: cost the plate

Here are three Kenyan staples costed with Wapishi's prices for the week of 10 November 2026. The quantities are example recipes for 10 portions, before trimming, and leave out oil, salt and spices. Use your own recipe cards and the current price list for your real numbers.

Kachumbari, 10 portions

INGREDIENT	AMOUNT	PRICE	COST
Tomatoes	1 kg	KSh 90 per kg	KSh 90
Red onions	0.5 kg	KSh 165 per kg	KSh 83
Dhania	1 bunch	KSh 30 per bunch	KSh 30
Green chilli	50 g	KSh 130 per kg	KSh 7
Lemon	200 g	KSh 110 per kg	KSh 22
Total			KSh 231, about KSh 23 a portion

Sukuma wiki, 10 portions

INGREDIENT	AMOUNT	PRICE	COST
Sukuma	5 bunches	KSh 35 per bunch	KSh 175
Onions	300 g	KSh 165 per kg	KSh 50
Tomatoes	500 g	KSh 90 per kg	KSh 45
Total			KSh 270, about KSh 27 a portion

Breakfast fruit plate, 10 plates

INGREDIENT	AMOUNT	PRICE	COST
Pineapple	1 piece	KSh 110 per piece	KSh 110
Watermelon	2 kg	KSh 60 per kg	KSh 120
Pawpaw	1 kg	KSh 130 per kg	KSh 130
Bananas	5 pieces	KSh 60 per 5 pieces	KSh 60
Total			KSh 420, about KSh 42 a plate

Step 4: compare with the menu price

Divide the plate cost by the menu price to get the food cost percentage for that dish. Add the other ingredients on the plate first, such as the ugali, meat or oil, so you are comparing the whole plate with what the customer pays. Set a target for each dish and watch for the ones that drift above it.

Step 5: re-cost when prices move

A single price can move a whole dish. In the kachumbari above, if tomatoes went from KSh 90 to KSh 120 a kilo, the batch would go from KSh 231 to KSh 261, about 13% more, with nothing else changed. When a staple jumps, you can raise the price, adjust the portion, or switch to a dish built on produce that is in season.

- ☐ **Check prices weekly** for your ten most-used items. Wapishi's price list shows each week's prices and what changed.

- [ ] **Re-cost your best sellers first.** They carry the most money.
- [ ] **Count waste as a cost.** Produce that spoils before it is used raises the real cost of every plate. The food waste guide shows where it usually goes.

Where costing usually goes wrong

MISTAKE	FIX
Costing the bought kilo	Cost the usable kilo, after peeling and trimming.
Bunches that change size	Weigh a few bunches, or buy from a supplier whose bunches are consistent.
Last month's prices	Re-cost from this week's prices.
Ignoring spoilage	Track what is thrown away and add it to the cost.
Cheap produce with a low usable share	Compare suppliers on cost per usable kilo, not the price per kilo.

Costing with Wapishi

Wapishi publishes its prices every week on the price list and shows live prices in the online shop, so you can cost a menu before you order. Every order comes with an eTIMS invoice, which makes it easier to match what you spent with what you sold. Qualified partners can pay on 30-day accounts, and you can try us first with a free sample pack on WhatsApp: 0769 912 227.

Quick answers

What is a usable kilo?

The weight left after peeling, trimming and sorting. If 1 kg of onions gives 900 g after peeling, your usable share is 90%, and each usable kilo costs the price divided by 0.9.

How do I cost items sold by the bunch or piece?

Weigh a few typical bunches or pieces after prep and use the average, or cost them per bunch or piece if your recipe uses whole ones.

How often should I re-cost my menu?

Re-cost the dishes built on your most-used vegetables whenever their prices move noticeably, and check the whole menu at least once a month. Wapishi publishes its prices every week, which makes this quick.

What food cost percentage should I aim for?

It depends on your concept, prices and other costs. Set a target for each dish, track it, and act when a dish drifts above it.

Buying for a kitchen in Nairobi?

Wapishi supplies fresh produce and kitchen staples to restaurants, hotels, caterers and canteens. Prices are published every week, and the latest version of this guide is online.

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