

Operator's Edge

The Successful Independent Operator's Resource

5 Ways to Create a Temporary On-Site Catering Kitchen

Unless your catering company is lucky enough to have an on-site kitchen at a popular venue like a hotel or convention center, at some point you will probably need to create a temporary kitchen at or near a venue for a large-scale party or vending operation. Temporary kitchens are a requirement for mobile catering and concessions operations. Whether you are catering a large outdoor wedding party or vending at a local farmers' market, you have several types of kitchens you can use temporarily.



1. Outdoor Kitchen: You can create your own outdoor kitchen setup with a tent and some commercial kitchen equipment. This is the most common type of temporary kitchen in the catering industry. A temporary outdoor tent kitchen is an ideal setup at markets, festivals or large-scale outside events such as outdoor weddings. You can also set one up outside in the parking lot or lawn of a venue, if the owner permits you to operate a kitchen there.

To create a temporary outdoor kitchen, it is best to use cooking equipment that runs off of liquid propane. You can use a refrigerated van for refrigeration space, or simply hook up a refrigerator on-site. You will also need a generator or electrical hookups for your commercial refrigeration or other equipment. Most commercial equipment is 220 V, so make sure you have access to this voltage.

Once you are at the location, first assemble a tent that will give you enough space to shelter all of your equipment. If you do not use a tent, you risk damaging your kitchen equipment if it rains or hails. You may want an enclosed tent so you can keep your kitchen operation hidden from your clients.

You may benefit from portable catering equipment, like the following:

- * **Portable hand sinks** - These often include a built-in water tank, so you don't have to hook it up to a water line.
- * **Portable propane stoves** - These are designed to provide you with a range as you move from place to place.
- * **Outdoor grills** - Some grills, known as tailgate grills even come with the equipment needed to hitch it to a trailer.

You can roll your cooking equipment and refrigeration out of a truck using a lift gate or ramp. Then you can proceed to hook up your generator and plug in your equipment. Once everything is set up, you should have the capability to prepare, fry, saute, bake and plate food in your temporary kitchen area. Be sure to bring extra propane in case you run out.

2. Van, Station Wagon or Truck: Purchase a refrigerated van or truck and stock it with cooking equipment on casters to create a mobile kitchen. If only part of the truck is refrigerated and there is enough space, you can cook inside the vehicle, or you can use the vehicle for refrigeration and prep alone, and equip the truck with a lift gate or ramp so you can roll cooking equipment directly out of the truck into a sheltered space.

Even if you are not planning on cooking at an event, a van or truck equipped with refrigeration or convection ovens allows you to keep food cool during transport and reheat it at the catering location. There are station wagons available with refrigerated trunks or trunks equipped with convection oven technology. There are also trucks and vans available that are equipped with both ovens and refrigeration built-in.

3. Trailer: If you frequently cater at outdoor events, a mobile trailer kitchen could be a great solution for you. You can purchase a fully equipped mobile trailer that includes refrigeration, work space and cooking equipment like commercial ovens, fryers and ranges. These trailers often have a window with an awning that you can use to vend directly to customers or as the expediter line between your kitchen and your servers, stewards and attendants.

4. Modular Kitchen: Much like a series of connected trailers, modular kitchens are designed for large-scale food production in a temporary environment. These are ideal if you need a temporary kitchen over a span of several weeks at large-scale events, conferences, festivals, trade shows, etc. You can rent these kinds of kitchens or purchase them. These kitchens are also used as a temporary kitchen space for disaster relief or during remodeling of large institutions like schools or hospitals.

There is another great use for modular kitchens: to serve as a commercial kitchen for a home-based catering business. You can purchase a modular kitchen and set it up in your back yard - this is exactly what modular kitchens are designed for. Then you will have a fully functional catering kitchen that is completely separate from your family kitchen. With the proper electrical and water hookups, you can put a modular kitchen just about anywhere.

5. Cart: If all you need is a little bit of work space, an ice bin and some food wells, a standard mobile vending cart might be a convenient portable kitchen for you. These carts are pre-built and are perfect for selling prepackaged or non-perishable foods. You can also have a cart custom-built with cooking equipment and refrigeration space, if needed. Cart-style vending is ideal for malls or concessions vending at an event center, park or outdoor market. You can also use a mobile to cater an outdoor private event, like a backyard party.

Source: Eleanor Frisch for Foodservice Warehouse