

HARVESTING WILD OYSTERS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

With a low tide and a little preparation you can harvest fresh oysters for your very own backyard oyster roast.



Wild, eastern oysters are a **nutrient dense food** that grow along our South Carolina Coast. A single serving (6) of wild oysters provides your **entire daily recommended intake** of many essential nutrients including **vitamin B-12, copper, zinc, and iron.**

STEP 1: PERMITTING

All harvesters must carry one of the following **Saltwater Fishing Licenses:**

- 1 Year Residential Permit - \$15.
- 14 Day Residential Permit - \$10.
- 1 Day Non-Resident Permit - \$10.
- 7 Day Non-Resident Permit - \$35.



Purchase a permit at bit.ly/41mBy0x

WHAT IS CULL IN PLACE?

Shellfish managers ask us to “cull in place” to help the reef stay healthy and strong. This means using a tool to **knock off young oysters that are smaller than 3"** and any dead or empty shells.

This step helps you harvest larger single oysters, leaving **empty shells to provide a foundation.** Young oysters floating by attach to these shells, helping a new generation of oysters grow and ensuring next year’s harvest.

This practice also supports the **essential ecosystem services** oyster reefs provide. Oyster reefs provide **habitat** for other shellfish and crustaceans, while finfish and reef-dwelling fish use the reef as a **safe place to lay eggs** and raise their young.

WHAT TO KNOW

Season/Times

- Approx. October 1 - May 15.
- Begin 30 Minutes before sunrise.
- End 30 minutes after sunset.

Harvest Limits

- 2 bushels (~16 gallons) a day.
- Limit harvesting to 2 days within a 7 day period
- Limit 3 harvesters per group

Equipment

- It is illegal to use scoops, scrapes, tongs, or dredges to take shellfish without a permit.
- Equipment includes tall boots or waders, a small hammer with a straight claw, and some 5-gallon buckets.

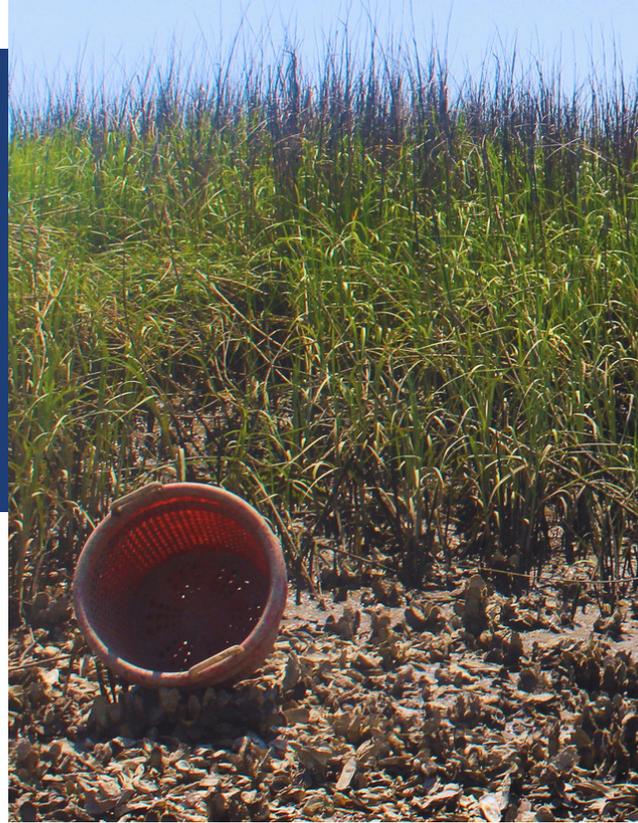


COOPERATIVE EXTENSION
College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences

WHERE CAN I SAFELY HARVEST?

A single oyster can filter 50 gallons of water a day, and remove excess nutrients from the water like nitrogen, balancing our waterways.

However you eat them, oysters are symbols of Lowcountry culture, but all that filtering means that **raw seafood consumption can carry some risk**. It is important to check for bed closures and safe harvesting areas. Following these next steps can help you **safely harvest** and enjoy local, Carolina oysters.



STEP 2: FIND YOUR BEDS



CHECK WITH S.C. DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

SCDES monitors water quality and updates their website with shellfish bed closures. Weather, traffic, or other factors can cause unsafe levels of bacteria in the water making these natural filters unsafe to eat.

Learn more at bit.ly/41oezIS



CHECK WITH S.C. DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

SCDNR manages both public and state shellfish grounds for recreational harvesters to ensure the current and future health of our shellfish populations. **Learn more at bit.ly/3D7sXH4**



STEP 3: ENJOY SUSTAINABLY



RECYCLE SHELLS WITH SCORE

Visit this South Carolina Oyster Recycling and Enhancement Program (SCORE) map to find public oyster shell recycling drop-offs throughout the state. Shell recycling means a sustainable future for local oysters. SCORE helps ensure that shells are **returned to areas that need them most!**

Learn more at bit.ly/4i4LKlz



RISKS OF OYSTER CONSUMPTION



Some people are at **greater risk for foodborne illness** and should avoid consuming raw shellfish.

These individuals include **persons with weakened immune systems, adults over 65, children under five, and pregnant women.**

→ **VIBRIO BACTERIA**

Vibrio are **bacteria that live in all salt water**. Because oysters are water filters, they naturally pull these bacteria out of the water.

Only **some *Vibrio* types are harmful** to humans, and they are **more present in the warmer summer months** (May-Oct). *Vibrio* can cause nausea, vomiting, fever, and diarrhea, and **some infections can be life threatening**.

→ **NOROVIRUS**

Norovirus is the **#1 cause of foodborne illness** in the U.S. Norovirus can enter the water from human waste or vomit that may come from boaters, leaking septic systems, wastewater treatment plant failures, or beachgoers.

Oysters capture this bacteria while filtering the water. When oysters are eaten raw, **Norovirus can cause serious illness and potentially death**. Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, stomach pain, body aches, headache, and fever.

You can't tell if an oyster is infected by sight or taste. Consuming raw oysters can be risky.

To be certain oysters are safe to eat, it is best to follow safe handling procedures and kill harmful bacteria by cooking oysters properly.

SAFE HANDLING PRACTICES FOR WILD OYSTERS



Finding a safe area to harvest is important, but bacteria can grow quickly once they are out of water. What are the risks and how can you keep your harvest safe to eat?

→ HANDLING AND STORING

As you return from your harvest, **put the oysters on ice as soon as possible**. You want the **temperature down to 45°F**. This is also a good time to **check for any dead, cracked, or open shells**. If you tap an open shell and it doesn't close, throw it back.

To keep them alive, remember to leave any coolers or airtight **containers cracked and drained of water**, covering the oysters with a moist cloth.

- **In the shell**, oysters can be safely stored under refrigeration (35-41°F) for **7-10 days**.
- **Shucked** oysters are safely stored under refrigeration for **3 days**.

→ COOKING

When you are ready to eat, **wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap** and water. No matter how you cook your oysters remember to cook the oysters to an internal **temperature of 145°F**, keep **raw food separate from cooked** food, and only use **clean equipment and utensils**.

- **In the shell**, boil the oysters until the shells open, plus another 3 - 5 minutes, or steam them for 4 - 9 minutes.
- **Shucked** oysters may be boiled for 3 minutes, fried at 375°F for 3 minutes, broiled at 3 inches from the heat source for 3 minutes, or baked at 450°F for 10 minutes.