

Hard Clam Fact Sheet

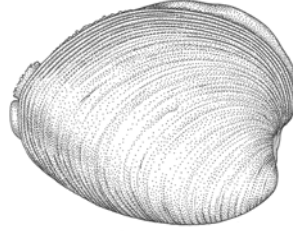


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Common name: Hard Clam

- Also known as the northern quahog (pronounced “co-hog”)

Latin name: *Mercenaria mercenaria*

Characteristics:

- Burrows at shallow depths in sand or mud with muscular foot allowing limited locomotion.
- Siphons water from above the sediment and filter feeds on algae and plankton.
- Become sexually reproductive after one year. Typical lifespan of four and eight years is determined by commercial harvest; natural lifespan is unknown but could be as long as 40 years.
- Hard clams are protandric hermaphrodites, meaning that most young clams are males but eventually half become female.
- Spawning begins in the spring and continues until midsummer, sometimes resuming in the fall.
- Adult clams can tolerate very low salinities for extended periods of time by closing their valves, though this may lead to decreased growth and reproduction.

Distribution:

- Occur naturally from the Gulf of St. Lawrence, down the east coast of the United States and around the Florida peninsula, through the Gulf of Mexico to the Yucatan Peninsula.
- Also farmed commercially throughout this region.

Local Fisheries:

- Many of commercially harvested local clams are farm raised. Farm raised clams, oysters and mussels benefit the environment by improving water quality by filter feeding.
- The majority (85%) of South Carolina clams are shipped out of state.

Management:

- The harvest season for hard clams begins on September 16th and ends May 15th.
- The South Carolina Department of Natural Resources issues commercial shellfish culture permits and commercial harvest permits for designated shellfish culture permit areas and State Shellfish Grounds.
- Heavy rainfall can sometimes lead to high levels of fecal coliform bacteria; some areas may be temporarily closed for shellfish harvest and other areas may be closed permanently.

Tips:

- Purchase live clams that are tightly shut or will close when tapped lightly. If they do not close, discard. Live clams in the shell can be stored in the refrigerator for seven days at temperatures between 38°F and 40°F in a container with a slightly open lid; drain excess liquid daily.