



Clam Fact Sheet

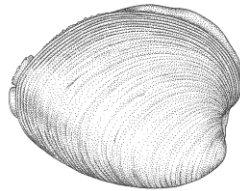


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Basic Biology

Latin name: *Mercenaria mercenaria*; another common name is northern quahog ("co-hog")

Range: 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

Habitat: Shallow depths in sand or mud

Diet: Siphons water from above the sediment and filter feeds on algae and plankton

Age and growth: Reproductive maturity after one year; typical lifespan of four and eight years (age at harvest); natural lifespan is unknown but could be as long as 40 years

Sustainability

- South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SC DNR) staff annually review data on the quality and quantity of the clam population and recent harvest to determine which state shellfish grounds will be open for commercial harvest. Staff visit shellfish harvest sites at the end of the season and sample for clam size and density to assess the status of the resource.
- The SC DNR issues commercial shellfish harvest permits and culture permits for State Shellfish Grounds and designated shellfish culture permit areas.
- Many clams are farm raised. Mariculture Permit areas are permitted exclusively for clam farming. In mariculture, the farmer plants seed clams, and may protect them from predation and rotate the growing clams to more appropriate areas. Clams used in mariculture are a native species and grow as wild clams do (no extra food or chemical treatments). Clam mariculture reduces the pressure on wild clam stocks and farm raised clams improve water quality through filter feeding.
- Allowable gear for clam harvest includes hand rakes, tongs, bull rakes, forks, or hydraulic escalators (subtidal areas only; mechanical harvest permit required). Clam harvesting with rakes can significantly disturb the integrity of oyster reefs, where these species co-occur. Hydraulic escalators disturb the bottom habitat, which is primarily muddy bottom.

Info for Chefs

- The harvest season for hard clams begins on September 16th and ends May 15th to allow for a spawning season closure. Farmed clams may be harvested year round, so local clams are always available.
- The South Carolina clam industry (wild and farmed) is one of the biggest seafood industries in the state but the majority (85%) of South Carolina clams are shipped out of state.

Info for Servers

- Many clams are harvested in South Carolina, both wild and farmed, and all are sustainable.
- Clams are protandric hermaphrodites, meaning that most young clams are males but eventually half become female.
- Clams feed by filtering water and consuming algae and plankton, improving water quality.

Sources: South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, State of South Carolina Coastal Resources: Oysters and Hard Clams, 2004 and Clam Update 2005 and 2006 - www.dnr.sc.gov/marine/publications.html