



# Oyster Fact Sheet

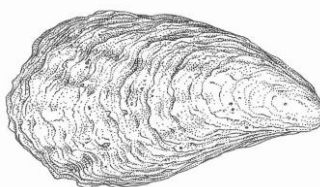


Image courtesy of Val Kells

## Basic Biology

Latin name: *Crassostrea virginica*

Range: The Atlantic coast of the U.S. and the Gulf of Mexico

Habitat: Sounds, bays, tidal creeks and on exposed mudflats

Diet: Filter-feeder

Age and growth: Adult oysters are ½ inch in shell height and reach harvest size around 3 years of age

## Sustainability

- The SC Department of Natural Resources (SC DNR) is responsible for oyster management. Fishermen must hold a commercial saltwater license, proper equipment licenses and an individual harvest permit. SC DNR conducts a monitoring program including collection of landings data, monitoring of oyster grounds for quantity, quality and oyster size, and monitoring of juvenile settling.
- The harvest season is from September 16<sup>th</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup>, during daylight hours.
- Typically harvested with long-handled tongs; mechanical dredging is by permit only.
- The oyster population in South Carolina is stable, though smaller than 100 years ago. Declines in oyster populations throughout the U.S. may be attributed to over harvesting, coastal development, deteriorating water quality, increased sediment loads and disease.
- Oyster larvae float on water currents for three to four weeks then settle to the bottom where they must find a clean, hard surface to which they can attach. Other oyster shells are the ideal settling habitat. If they do not find such a surface they will settle to the bottom and die, thus recycling of oyster shells is extremely important.

## Info for Chefs

- Spawning occurs from April to October, peaking during the summer months. During that time, oysters devote energy to reproduction instead of body mass and their quality as a food item decreases, thus the harvest closure during the summer months.
- The SC DNR's Oyster Recycling and Restoration Program is dedicated to oyster shell recycling and oyster bed restoration. Twelve oyster shell recycling centers are located along the South Carolina coast. Consumers and restaurateurs are encouraged to deposit clean shell at these centers. Shell will then be used to restore shellfish beds and enhance current resources.

## Info for Servers

- Oysters feed by filtering particles from the water, simultaneously cleansing various pollutants from the water. A large, healthy oyster can filter as much as four gallons per hour.
- Oysters initially mature as males, then change sex and become female.
- In inter-tidal (above water during low tide) environments oysters spawn intermittently through the spawning season and may settle on each other, creating a cluster with thin, elongated, irregularly shaped shells. In sub-tidal (below water at low tide) environments oysters spawn in one shorter time period, therefore new oysters settle on much older and larger oysters, grow thicker, heavier shells and can be broken into singles. In South Carolina most oysters grow in inter-tidal environments in clusters whereas oysters in Chesapeake Bay, Md. and Apalachicola Bay, Fl. grow in sub-tidal environments as singles.

Sources: [www.dnr.state.sc.us/marine/mrri/acechar/specgal/oyster.htm](http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/marine/mrri/acechar/specgal/oyster.htm), [www.dnr.state.sc.us/marine/pub/seascience/oyster.html](http://www.dnr.state.sc.us/marine/pub/seascience/oyster.html), <http://saltwaterfishing.sc.gov/oyster.html>