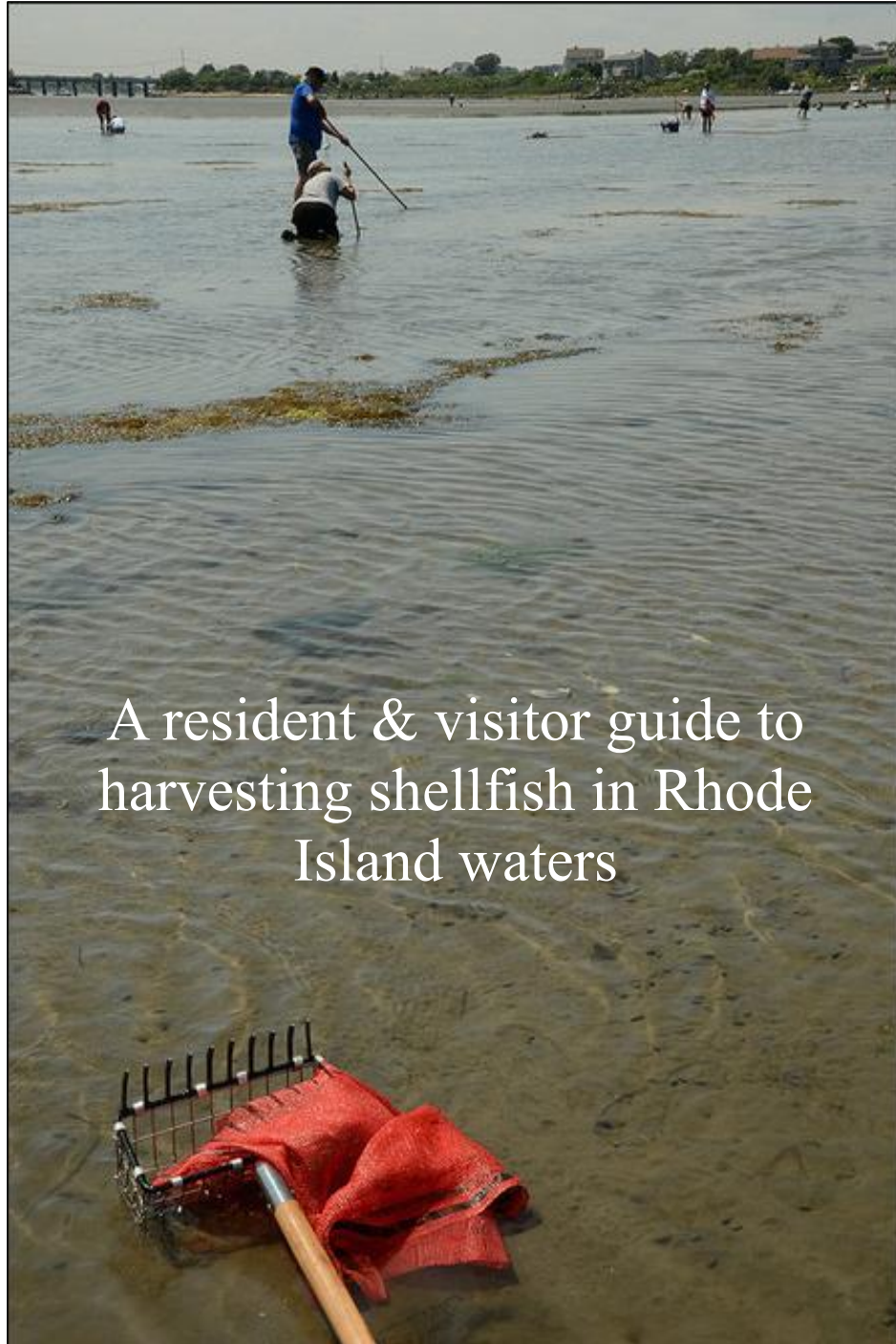


Digging Your Own Shellfish In Rhode Island



A resident & visitor guide to
harvesting shellfish in Rhode
Island waters

Created by the Coastal Resources Center (CRC) and RI Sea Grant, 2014

Those Delicious Shellfish...



“You can’t get any fresher than that!”

Former Governor Lincoln Chafee

Chafee’s comments came after harvesting quahogs with the Coastal Resources/Rhode Island Sea Grant “Clamming 101” class in 2013. You too can harvest fresh, delicious shellfish from our Bay and coastal salt ponds with little equipment – all you need is enthusiasm and a sense of adventure!

Recreational harvest of shellfish is a traditional pastime and valued cultural component to the Rhode Island way of life. Many local residents and tourists of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds flock to the shorelines of Narragansett Bay and Salt Ponds to harvest quahogs, steamers, limpets, and more during the summer season. Many have described shellfishing as a tranquil experience, connecting them with nature and their innate desire to gather and consume their own fresh seafood. Historically, recreational shellfishing in Rhode Island began between 10,000 and 12,000 years ago, when Native Americans started to inhabit New England while living along its coastal areas in the late spring and summer and harvesting herring and shellfish. By the 16th and 17th century, when European immigrants began to arrive in Rhode Island, the trade of shellfish between the colonialist and Native American’s was common. The Narragansett's Indians were also likely to be the first producers of “wampum” and introduced it to other Native Americans nations for trade.



Since shellfishing’s early beginnings, a vast amount of work, research and questioning has been done about the shellfish readily available in Narragansett Bay and the Salt Ponds. Shellfish not only provide a valued pastime but also support thriving commercial harvest and aquaculture industries, bringing in over \$10M annually to the state economy and creating livelihoods for hundreds of Rhode Islanders.

Types of Shellfish for harvest...

Quahogs— Quahogs (also referred to as ‘quahaugs’ in shellfish regulations) are a popular species harvested by commercial and recreational diggers alike, and are also cultivated by aquaculturists. There are four market categories for quahogs - All are the same species but these market categories help distinguish price. Two varieties of quahog exist, which differ only in



color, and are native to Rhode Island waters: “alba” and “notata”. The alba variety is the most common, having a white shell, whereas the notata quahog has a reddish-brown pattern on the shell and is found in 1-2

percent of the wild population. The difference is a natural occurrence due to a single locus genetic variation.

From left to right: Top Neck Quahogs, alba variety; The four market categories of quahogs; “Notata” variety of quahog with brown shell pattern.

Soft-shell clam— Commonly referred to as “steamers,” these white clams have a thinner, softer shell than quahogs. They are harvested both commercially and recreationally. Along the shore, soft-shell clams can often be spotted on sand flats due to the hole left in the sand from their protruding siphons and will often squirt water through there holes when you step on the sand next to them.



American razor clam, Atlantic jack knife— These two different species are each found in sand or muddy bottoms along the shore. Razor clams have a streamlined, long shell with a strong, muscular “foot,” allowing the clam to burrow very quickly, as well as swim, if needed. Jack knife clams can be given similar descriptions but are often more blunt and shorter than razor clams. The clams are primarily harvested recreationally, though to a lesser degree compared to quahogs and soft-shell clams and there is a very limited commercial fishery.



Eastern oyster – Oysters are considered foundational species, creating reefs and habitat for other species. The oyster is a coveted species by growers and harvesters alike in Rhode Island. The shell is often white in color, has ridges and is very strong and difficult to open without proper tools. The oyster is, by far, the most cultivated species by the State’s aquaculture industry, comprising over 98% of all aquaculture and generating over \$6M in revenue in 2014. In general, there is comparatively little effort to harvest wild oysters recreationally or commercially due to low natural abundance and wild harvest only being permitted in the colder months.



Blue mussel – Blue mussels or “edible mussels” are harvested commercially and recreationally throughout Rhode Island, and are grown on several aquaculture lease sites. Shaped like a rounded triangle, they are black to brown in color on the outside with a shiny violet interior when opened. They grow most often in clumps and attach to rocks, pilings, and other hard structures using their strong bisset threads.



Bay scallop – Bay scallops are small in size (3 inches) with an exterior shell color that ranges widely from grey to yellow to red. Along the edge are 30-40 bright blue eyes, allowing the scallop to detect movement and shadows in the water. Bay scallops grow quickly and generally live for two years. They are able to swim, rapidly closing their valves to expel water and push them through the water column. The species is popular among commercial and recreational harvesters during the open season.



Channeled whelk and knobbed whelk – These two species are often grouped together, most of referred to as “conchs” or “snails” by commercial fishermen. Spiral shells; the knobbed whelk typically has strong, blunt knobs around the top whorls or spirals. The shell of the channeled whelk is generally smooth and more pear-shaped. Both species can tuck their muscular foot into their shell and close it to provide protection to the soft flesh within the shell. Whelks are popular among the commercial fishery, but are less targeted by recreational shellfish harvesters.



Periwinkle – These small, edible sea snails are black in color, wide and oval with a sharp point. Periwinkles rarely grow bigger than 2 inches. While there is no commercial fishery for these species, they are recreationally harvested off rocks and other structure along the intertidal zone.

Who Can Harvest Shellfish ...



Rhode Island Residents... No License Required. Any resident may, without a license, harvest quahogs, soft-shelled clams, mussels, surf clams, oysters (in season), and bay scallops (in season). Harvested shellfish shall not be sold. See below for possession limits in designated areas.

Non-Rhode Island Residents... Licensed required. Visitors to Rhode Island (i.e. non-residents) must purchase a license to harvest shellfish. A license allows the harvest of quahogs, soft-shelled clams, mussels, surf clams, oysters (in season). Non-residents cannot harvest lobsters, blue crabs, or bay scallops. See below for possession limits in designated areas.

Non-Resident Property Owners... A non-resident landowner (i.e. someone who owns residential real estate in Rhode Island assessed at a value of not less than \$30,000) may, with proof of property ownership, obtain an annual, non-commercial, non-resident shellfish license for \$25. This license holds the same restrictions and allowable daily catch limits as a licensed non-resident.

Shellfishing is permitted in designated areas, according to the license requirements listed above, between **sunrises and sunset**. Anyone harvesting after sunset and/or before sunrise is subject to a fine of up to \$1,000 or by imprisonment up to 3 years.

Remember: 1 Bushel (Bu) is 9.3 gallons (about ¾ full orange fish basket) and 1 Peck (Pk) is 2.3 gallons (a little less than half of a 5 gallon bucket).

Species	Minimum size	Resident Recreational Limit	Non-Resident Recreational Limit
Channeled and Knobbed Whelk (Conch) <i>Busycon sp.</i>	2-7/8" diameter and/or 5-1/8" length	1/2 Bushel	Residents Only
Bay Quahog <i>Mercenaria mercenaria</i>	1" hinge width	1/2 Bushel	1 Peck
Soft-shelled clam <i>Mya arenaria</i>	2" longest axis	1/2 Bushel	1 Peck
Oyster <i>Crassostrea virginica</i>	3" longest axis	1/2 Bushel	1 Peck
Scallop <i>Argopecten irradians</i>	No seed possession	1 Bushel	Residents Only
Surf Clam <i>Spisula solidissima</i>	5" longest axis	1/2 Bushel	1 Peck



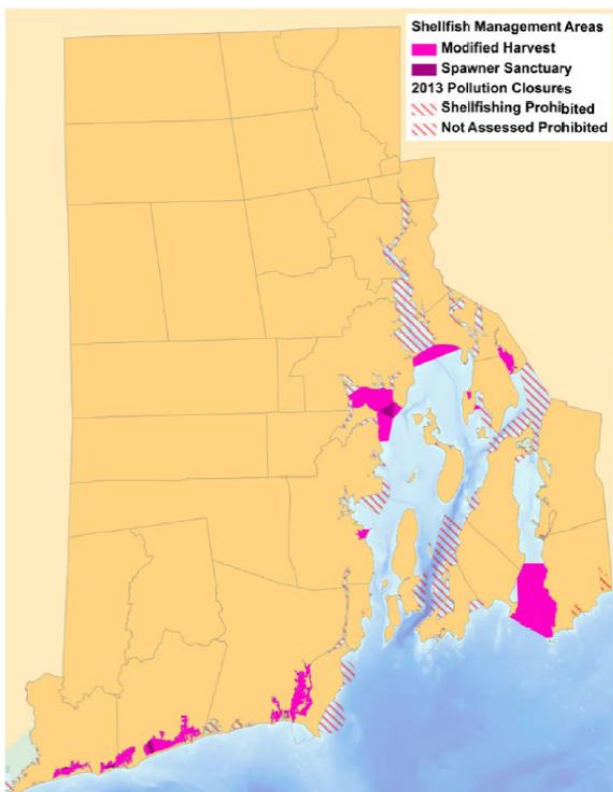
Where and How Can I Harvest Shellfish?

*T*he Rhode Island Department of Environmental

Management (RI DEM) designates different areas for harvest and/or management of shellfish. These are called “Shellfish Management Areas” and “Non Shellfish Management Areas.” Shellfish Management Areas are certain areas within the waters of Rhode Island that have some form of shellfish management occurring. This can include shellfish spawner sanctuaries and shellfish restoration activities. Shellfish

harvesting may or not be allowed. Additionally, harvesting is not allowed within areas where signs indicate prohibition.

*S*hellfish Management Areas are the following locations: Greenwich Bay, Conanicut Point, Potowomut, High Banks, Bissel Cove/Fox Island, Mill Gut, Bristol Harbor, Kickemuit River, Jenny’s Creek, Sakonnet River, Pt. Judith Pond, Potter Pond, Ninigret (Charlestown) Pond, Quonochontaug Pond, and Winnapaug Pond. All other locations are Non-Shellfish Management Areas.



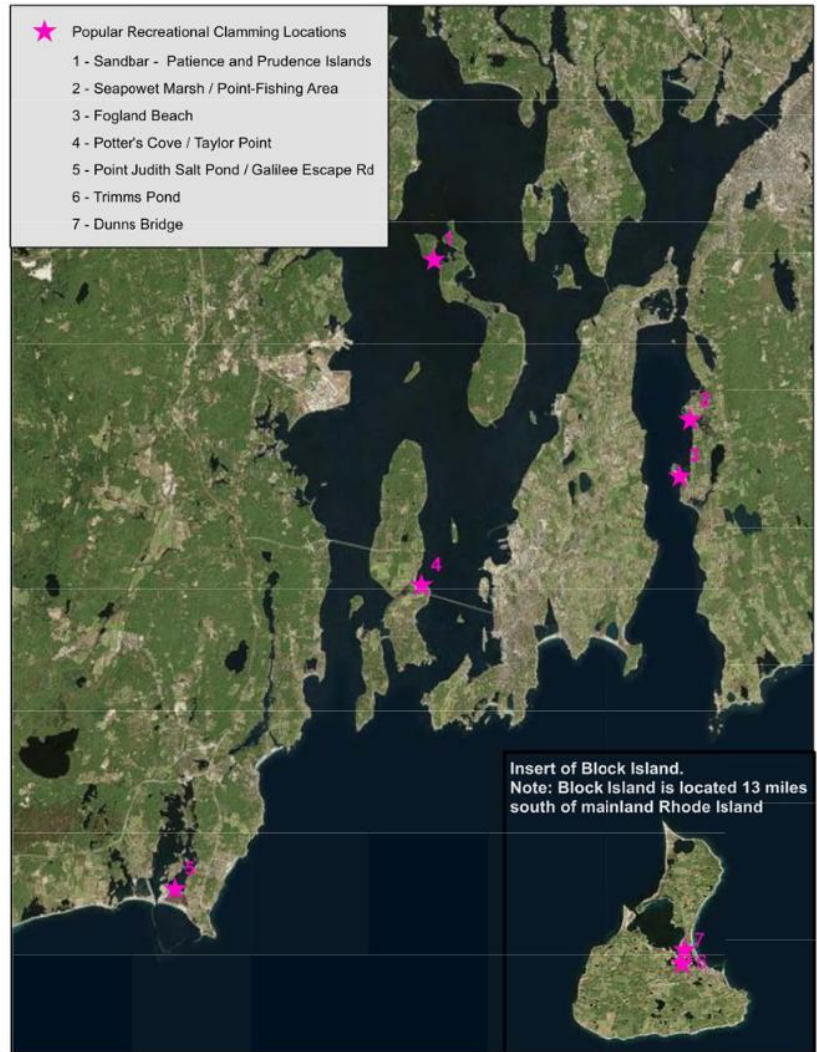
*T*here are many different tools you can use to harvest shellfish. Some people use their hands while others use simple gardening tools like rakes, pitch forks, and hand trowels. Your local bait shop also sells clamming rakes and measuring tools. All of these tools are permitted and depend on personal preference.

*K*ee it cold! Please remember to bring ice/ ice packs with you and a cooler. Shellfish that are not kept cold can become dangerous due to bacterial growth. Do not leave shellfish in the sun. When you return home, refrigerate in a dry container and cook within a few days for maximum freshness.

Don't forget to bring these items with you: Clamming rake or other tools for digging; clamming license or driver's license; measuring device (gauge); cooler and ice packs, sunscreen, hat, sturdy shoes, and clothes you don't mind getting dirty; towel and gloves.

There are many places to harvest shellfish throughout the state. Remember to always check with RI DEM to ensure the area you are considering is open for harvest. When in doubt, call 401-222-2900. Some popular locations include: The Galilee Escape Road in Narragansett, Fogland Beach in Little Compton, and Potter's Cove in Jamestown.

Bites after clamming? Some people are affected by small parasitic snails that live in the mud, receiving bites after clamming that result in a poison ivy-type rash. To avoid these pests, rub arms and legs vigorously with a towel when you finish clamming. If a rash still results, treat like you would poison ivy and symptoms should subside after a week or two.



Resources...

Check for updates, regulations, and area closure info at: www.dem.ri.gov

For more information on the Shellfish Management Plan, visit www.RISMP.org.

RI DEM Shellfish Closure hotline:
401.222.2900

Coastal Resources Center/Rhode Island Sea Grant: smp@etal.uri.edu