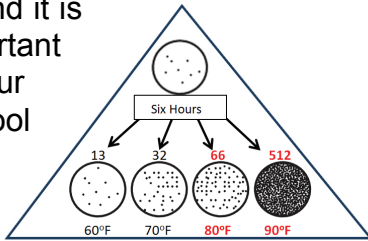


CAN I EAT MY CATCH RAW?

Eating oysters and quahogs raw is a traditional and tasty way to handle your harvest, but there are risks to be aware of. There are naturally occurring bacteria such as *Vibrio* species that can accumulate in shellfish and at high levels can cause human illness. These bacteria respond to temperature; they multiply rapidly at high temps (80°F+) and their growth slows or ceases at low temps (45°F). The risk is much greater in the warmer months, and it is extra important to keep your shellfish cool after their harvest at this time.



Unfortunately, certain groups of people are at heightened risk of *Vibrio* illness and should not consume shellfish or any animal product raw. The FDA has placed immunocompromised individuals such as those with liver disease, alcoholism, cancer, diabetes, chronic kidney disease, AIDS, low stomach acidity, or on steroid or immunosuppressive drugs in this group. Fortunately, cooking shellfish to 145°F will destroy this bacteria and most other potential pathogens, so anyone can still enjoy their harvest in one of many potential recipes!



PLEASE REMEMBER

- Obtain a recreational shellfish license from your town - it is required.
- Only harvest from town approved areas.
- Keep harvested shellfish cool.
- In warm weather bring cooler with ice to cool your harvest quickly.
- Never leave shellfish in direct sun or hot enclosed area such as car trunk.
- Refrigerate shellfish but do not store shellfish in water.
- Eat shellfish as soon as possible after harvest for maximum enjoyment.
- DO NOT consume raw if you have a challenged immune system (such as diabetes, liver disease, etc.).

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Safe Seafood Series

THE HARVEST: SAFE SHELLFISH FOR RECREATIONAL HARVESTERS



Keep it cool and
enjoy it fresh!

GUIDELINES FOR SAFE SHELLFISH

Harvesting your own shellfish for a tasty meal is an experience many Massachusetts residents and visitors enjoy. Surrounded by the cold clean waters of the Atlantic, the “Bay State” provides a natural buffet of shellfish choices. But before you set out to “dig your own” there are basic guidelines to follow and be aware of.



Where to Start?

In MA the management of recreational harvest is done by each coastal town. The town should have a shellfish or natural resource department where you can obtain a required license, the regulations, and a map of areas open and closed to shellfishing. They are a great source of town shellfish information.

Where Do Our Shellfish Come From?

Some of the clams and oysters you harvest come from ‘natural set’ which are the progeny (spat) from reproductive adults. However, sometimes nature needs a helping hand when there are insufficient numbers of new recruits being produced. Towns have several methods they employ to ensure shellfish beds remain productive.

Most towns have dedicated funds within their budgets to enhance shellfish locally. Towns expend significant effort growing shellfish to ensure maximum growth and survival. Shellfish relays are another option and involve the transfer of shellfish from an area closed to harvest to another area for a depuration period and eventual harvest.



Why are Some Areas Closed?

The MA State Division of Marine Fisheries works closely with towns to regulate and manage shellfish growing areas. They monitor water quality for conditions such as bacterial/viral contamination and harmful algal blooms (HAB's) such as “red tide.” Water quality and its relationship to safety is the basis for opening or closing areas so it is important to heed these designations.

KEEP SHELLFISH COOL



Handling the Harvest?

After making sure to harvest shellfish from waters open to shellfishing, the most important thing is to properly handle and store your catch for maximum freshness. Shellfish should be kept cool (35-40°F) and moist (but not frozen); this is most easily done in the refrigerator crisper bin. Kept cool, tightly closed shellfish like oysters and quahogs can stay fresh for several days, while soft shell clams and mussels should be used more quickly. If shellfish are gaping open and do not respond to touch they are dead and should not be consumed.

It is not recommended to store shellfish after harvest in containers of water (fresh or salt). If purging of sand is desired this may be done at the time of harvest in your basket while shellfishing. Purging at home may allow unwanted bacteria to accumulate adding unnecessary risk to your harvest.