

Don't Chuck Those Shucks; Save Some Bucks

There's a better way to rid yourself of oyster shells, a way that will help the environment and save you a little money

The N.C. Oyster Shell Recycling Program collects oyster shells from restaurants, oyster roasts and the general public to use in N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries oyster rehabilitation projects. Businesses and individuals that participate can get a tax credit for the oysters they donate to this program.

The Raw Deal

Eating oysters is a tradition almost as old as the oceans, but habitat loss, pollution and disease has taken their toll on oyster populations. North Carolina's oyster harvest is estimated to be at only 10% of historic levels.

Fortunately for oyster eaters and aquatic communities the N.C. Oyster Shell Recycling program can help turn this tide. This program of the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries collects oyster shells from restaurants, oyster roasts and the general public. They are placed back into coastal waters to help build oyster reefs.

Oyster reefs are an important part of aquatic life in coastal North Carolina. Baby oysters begin life as free-floating organisms but quickly settle to the bottom attaching themselves to hard surfaces. Their favorite place to grow is on other shells. A mound of oyster shells placed in brackish water with good tidal flow will quickly colonize with a multitude of marine organisms, including oysters. This mound, called an oyster reef, will produce more oysters.



It will also provide habitat for other beneficial organisms, such as algae, worms, barnacles, crabs, small minnows and fish. The small fish will attract a diversity of larger fish until soon there's a veritable metropolis of critters congregating at the reef.

Oysters serve an additional important purpose. They clean water by feeding on plankton and decaying waterborne organic matter. One oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water a day, so the larger and healthier our oyster population, the cleaner the water.



How to Help

There are a number of designated oyster shell drop off sites which can be found at www.ncdmf.net/shellfish/recycle4.htm.

Restaurants that serve oysters can get involved in oyster rehabilitation by participating in the Oyster Shell Recycling Program. List of participating restaurants can be found at www.ncdmf.net/shellfish/download/restaurants_recycle.pdf

For an event that includes a large oyster roast, arrangements can be made for special trailers to collect and transport the shells.

For more information on Oyster Shell Recycling go to www.ncdmf.net/shellfish/recycle1.htm, or contact Sabrina Varnam, Oyster Shell Recycling Program Coordinator, at 1-800-682-2632 or 252-726-7021 or sabrina.varnam@ncdenr.gov.

To receive the credit, the taxpayer must file, with his or her tax return, a certification issued by DMF stating the number of bushels donated by the taxpayer. Arrangements through the coordinator are required before donation. For more information visit www.ncdmf.net/shellfish/recycleform.htm.



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