

## Oyster Shell Recycling Trash to Treasure

North Carolina has launched an innovative recycling program to collect oyster shells from individuals and businesses and place them back overboard to help turn the tide on declining oyster stocks.

Baby oysters begin life as free-floating organisms but quickly settle to the bottom attaching themselves to hard surfaces. That's why oysters grow in clumps on pilings and concrete, but their favorite most productive place to grow is on other shells.

A mound of oyster shells placed in brackish water with good tidal flow will quickly become colonized by a multitude of marine organisms, including oysters. This mound, also called an oyster reef, serves a number of purposes – first and foremost, it helps produce oysters.



Secondly, it provides habitat for other beneficial organisms, such as algae, worms, barnacles, crabs, small minnows and fish. The

small fish attract a diversity of larger fish and before you know it, you have a community of critters congregating at your reef and all you did was put the shells over – in the right spot.



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

## Building the Reefs

Most of the recycled shells are used in annual cultch planting. The shells are loaded onto barges and sprayed off with a high-pressure water hose to create reefs. These sites are located in brackish to salty coastal waters. Shells make great homes for oysters. A single oyster produces millions of eggs annually that are carried by currents and tides to surrounding areas, enhancing oyster production in adjacent waters. Once the shells are placed on a reef they begin to attract baby oysters. Oysters grow to harvesting size in 2 to 3 years.



One individual may not be able to create a sizable reef, but by pooling our shell resources, researchers and scientists can construct large reefs in prime oyster growing areas enhancing oyster productivity and providing hook and line fishing opportunities for the public.

So take your shells destined for the trash heap and turn them into an estuarine treasure by participating in the North Carolina Oyster Shell Recycling Program.



## How You Can Help

**Get involved** – People are needed to serve as volunteers to help with collection of shells and to maintain sites, using cans and special bins. Civic clubs, businesses, and schools can also volunteer. Collection sites are located at restaurants, seafood markets, stores, trash convenient sites, parks and schools. Once a site is full, a volunteer will either service the cans to a nearby landfill or bin, or contact the recycling coordinator to pick up the shells. The shells are taken to a facility to stockpile until planting season. After the shells have aged, and there is no threat of any type of contamination, they are placed in the water to create new reefs.

**Give Us Your Shells** – Drop your shells off at a designated disposal site and feel good that you are helping conserve this important natural resource. Also, if your business, church or community is having a large oyster roast, arrangements can be made to have special trailers brought right to the roast to collect the shells. Encourage seafood markets and restaurants you frequent to join the recycling efforts.



### Estuarine Species Attracted to Oyster Reefs:

Barnacles	Pinfish
Black Sea Bass	Pigfish
Black Drum	Red Drum
Blennies	Sea Mullet
Bryozoans	Sheepshead
Crabs	Shrimp
Croaker	Spadefish
Flounder	Speckled Trout
Gag Grouper	Spot
Gray Trout	Striped Bass
Mussels	Turtles
Oyster Toadfish	Tunicates



**For More Information Contact:**  
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