

The NC Under Dock Oyster Culture Program.

AKA

**Legally growing your own
delicious oysters.**

If you own a pier in “open” waters, Marine Fisheries will grant you a UDOC permit that will allow you to grow oysters in floating cages under your pier.



There are some restrictions. The most important are that you are not allowed to sell these oysters and you are allowed a maximum of about 20 cages. That will easily accommodate several thousand oysters, from spats to mature 3" to 4" oysters.



I expect all of you here know the value of oysters to the environment. When your UDOC oysters spawn, they increase the wild stock of oysters and that is one of the reason this program exists.



However, in addition to the satisfaction of helping the environment, one of the major benefits is that you can eat your UDOC oysters and share them with family and friends all yearlong... and I do.



The Shellfish Gardeners Club of North Carolina (SGNC) is a group of people dedicated to this hobby. The club meets once or twice a year so that members can buy spats and the specialized equipment used to grow these oysters. The meetings are also an opportunity to share experiences and ideas.



Millpoint Aquaculture in Sea Level, the only hatchery in NC, spawns the spats. They vary in size from time to time but typically these mostly single oysters are the size of dimes and pennies and are bought in lots of 1000.



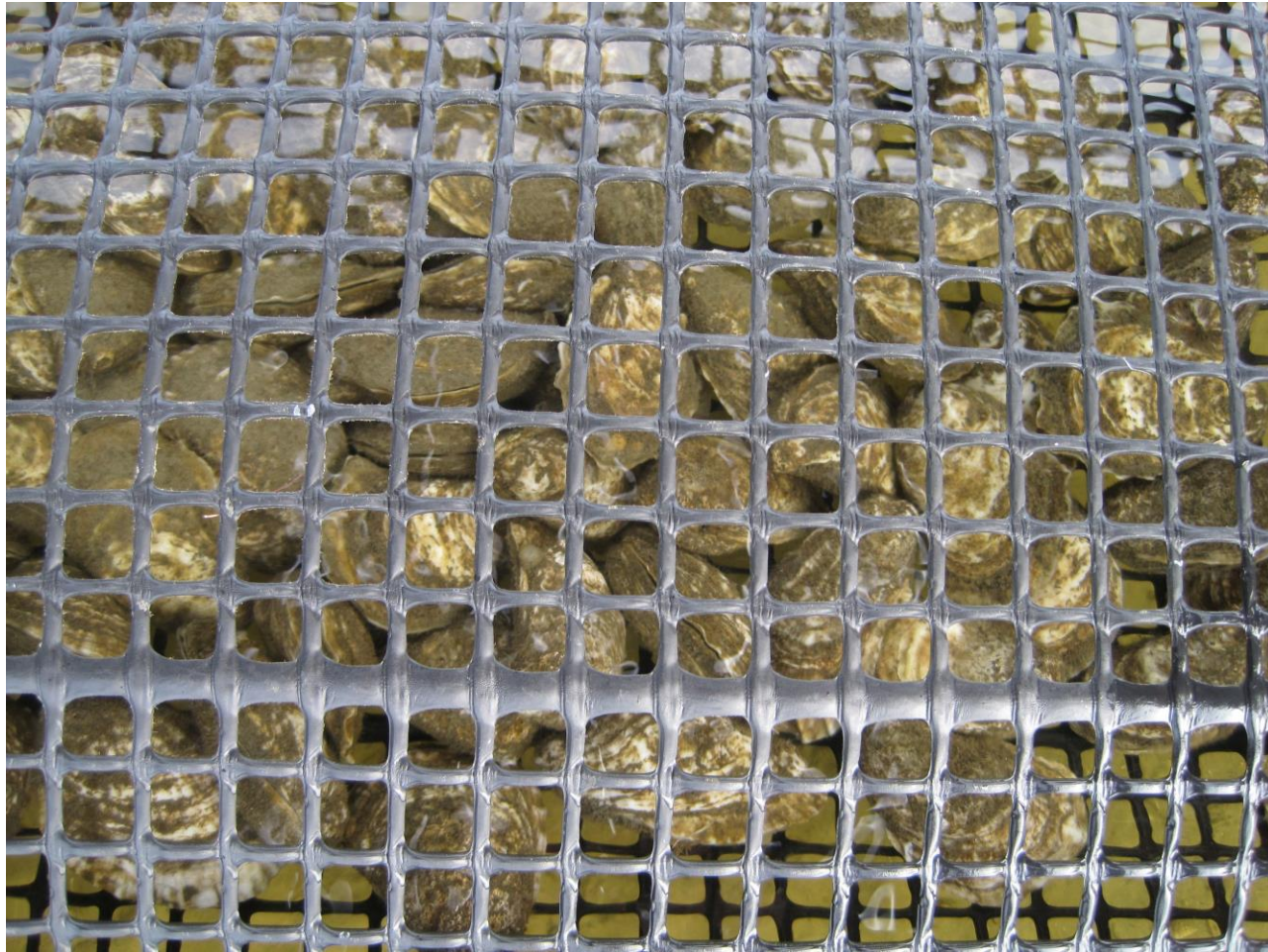
These spats are placed in one or two fine mesh cages and moved to larger mesh cages as they grow. Not all will survive but with care, you should get 60%+ yield. Not all spats grow at the same rate but some will be eating size (about 3 inches) in 12 to 14 months.



If the spat are purchased in late spring, it's a good idea to pull the cages about once a month, replace them when fouled up, and by all means, get the crabs out as they will eat a lot of oysters. Here is the worst infestation of barnacles I have seen. It took 5 weeks to scrape the barnacles off the oysters.



As the oysters grow you need to spread them out. By the time they reach 3 ½" to 4" I try to have a hundred or less to a cage. Much more than that and the cages can become difficult to handle particularly when you add summer fouling.



Properly securing the cages to the pilings of the pier may seem elementary but is very important. I use “O” rings and snap hooks, nylon shock cord, bungee and stainless screw eyes, 4 on each cage.



Oyster culture is not difficult but does require some work, particularly in the warmer months. Fouling of the oysters, cages and floats by barnacle, tunicates, various algae need to be controlled. In the past, from April to October, I moved oysters to clean cages and floats every month, removing crabs, tunicates, most barnacles and any other undesirables. Cages and floats are allowed to dry in the sun and then pressure washed.

This past fall, while attending the 6th International Oyster Symposium in Woods Hole MA., I heard a presentation by Bill Walton, Associate Professor, Auburn U. Shellfish Lab, that offered a simple solution to prevent fouling. The results were impressive: the process involved taking the cages out of the water one day a week: 6 days in the water, one day out, no fouling. I plan to try it this spring. At my location, fouling in the winter is minimal.

I borrowed this next slide from his presentation.

Standard Procedure?

- Desiccate oysters and gear weekly from mid-March to mid-November for 24 hours at a time
 - Reduced to overnight desiccation if air temperature exceeds about 95° F
- Desiccation for colder months dropped to every two weeks or so
 - Can be increased if problem seen (e.g., barnacle set)
- Oysters grown at about 150 per Vexar bag or 75-90 per long-line basket
- All these rules of thumb work for us BUT can be optimized AND need to be evaluated in new locations

As you can imagine, we eat a lot of oysters with family and our many friends that come to the coast ready to party. And... oyster parties are the best.









More information @ www.oysters-cleanwater.info



Item		Price
	Cages	
4mm diagonal		\$4.00
16mm diagonal		\$4.50
9mm Intermas		\$8.00
13mm Intermas		\$8.00
18mm Intermas		\$8.00
	Other	
Plastic floats		\$6.50
Foam floats		\$3.50
SS Hooks		\$0.60
O rings		\$0.30
Snap hooks		\$0.35
Bungee		0.20 ft
Screw eyes		\$0.50
Signs		\$2.00
Backer board		\$2.00
Contact:	Phil Gagnon	ypgagnon@aol.com
		H: 252-354-5989
		C: 252-241-9380