Cultivated North Carolina Shellfish

Since 1858, North Carolina has allowed growers to lease public waters for commercial shellfish production.

In our coastal waters, independent growers cultivate oysters and clams through a method known as marine aquaculture, or mariculture. This includes growing oysters in cages or bags.

Cultivated N.C. shellfish are a wise consumer choice.

If you're considering consuming raw shellfish, remember: *Any raw food can potentially contain bacteria or viruses that can make people ill, particularly individuals with weakened immune systems. Those with chronic health issues should avoid eating raw or undercooked shellfish.*

More Bang for the Shuck

When you choose cultivated North Carolina shellfish, you're not just getting a nutritious, sustainable resource — you're also supporting local economies and shellfish growers' livelihoods.

- Learn more about this growing industry: *go.ncsu.edu/shellfish*
- For shellfish recipes, visit: *marinersmenu.org.*

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Quality Waters. Great Taste. Sustainably Grown.

Ever bitten into a juicy oyster or clam grown in North Carolina waters? Tasty, right?

It's no secret that N.C. shellfish are a boon to the taste buds. What's more, enjoying local oysters and clams supports local economies and environmental sustainability.

Quality Waters

To ensure that North Carolina shellfish are safe to eat, the state's Division of Marine Fisheries, or DMF, regularly samples water in shellfish harvest areas for potential disease-causing bacteria. The presence of such bacteria could make shellfish unsafe to eat.

When necessary — say, after a heavy rain or severe weather event — the state will temporarily close certain harvest areas to protect public health. Areas reopen once testing indicates that water quality is satisfactory again.

"North Carolina has very good water quality in the areas where cultivated shellfish are grown," says Shannon Jenkins of DMF.

Great Taste

Perhaps you've heard of *terroir* — the combination of soil, climate and other environmental factors that gives different wines distinctive tastes. Similarly, shellfish have *merroir.* Their flavor reflects characteristics of their growing waters, such as salinity and the type of plankton present.

"More subtle complexities are identifiable the more you eat and taste oysters from a variety of locations," says Craig Love, chef and founder of Surf House Oyster Bar and Restaurant in Carolina Beach.

Ask your local grower or fishmonger for information about where shellfish were raised or harvested.

Were they in deep water near an inlet, for example, or in shallow water by a marsh bed?

"Those details are going to give you a much better understanding as to what you are tasting and why," Love says.

Sustainably Grown

Shellfish aquaculture is easy on the environment. To raise oysters and clams, growers don't need to add feed or fertilizer. The shellfish get all the nutrients they need from plankton, which they filter from the water through their gills.

This method of filter feeding has an added benefit: It improves water quality. Oysters and clams remove excess carbon and nitrogen from the water as they feed.

"Oyster aquaculture gear also serves as habitat for juvenile fish, further aiding the health of the environment," says Katherine McGlade, founder of Slash Creek Oysters, located in Pamlico Sound off Hatteras Village.

With shellfish aquaculture, "it's as sustainable as it gets," says Ryan Bethea, founder of Oysters Carolina, based in Harkers Island.

"We're not taking anything out of the water that we're not putting in, generally speaking."