



North Carolina
Coastal Federation
Working Together for a Healthy Coast



**RECYCLE
FOR REEFS**

Frequently Asked Questions: Oyster Shell Recycling in Coastal North Carolina

1. What is oyster shell recycling, and why is it important?

Oyster shell recycling involves collecting discarded oyster shells from restaurants, seafood markets, and events and then returning them to the coastal waters to provide habitat for new oyster growth. This process supports local ecosystems, improves water quality, and enhances shoreline stability.

2. Where can I drop off my oyster shells for recycling?

Many coastal communities have established drop-off locations for oyster shells. These can include local seafood restaurants, community centers, and recycling centers. You can find a map of public drop-off locations at <https://www.nccoast.org/project/oyster-shell-recycling-program/>

3. Can you recycle other kinds of shells?

While we prefer oyster shells for the environmental benefit of restoring and maintaining oyster populations, we will accept small amounts of mussel and clam shells.

4. Can I recycle oyster shells after cooking them at home?

Yes. You can recycle oyster shells from home after enjoying a delicious meal. The collected shells undergo a 'curing' process where bacteria are killed through prolonged exposure to sunlight before they are put back into the water to build new reefs.

5. How long before the recycled shell is used to build a new reef?

Recycled oyster shells are collected and cured to remove any potential pathogens, and then strategically placed in coastal waters to create oyster reefs. The curing process for oyster shells typically takes several months to a year, depending on various factors. The process involves removing organic material, sterilizing the shells, and allowing them to weather naturally. Curing oyster shells is an important step to make them suitable for reuse in various applications, such as oyster reef restoration. These reefs provide essential habitats for various marine species, help filter water, and protect shorelines from erosion.

6. Are there any specific guidelines for preparing oyster shells for recycling?

Yes. It's important to ensure that the oyster shells are free of **all** trash before recycling. Please remove napkins, silverware, food wrappers, and other food waste. If using a plastic trash bag to transport shells,

please do not throw plastic bags into the waste receptacle. Any trash discarded with oyster shells is a risk for creating marine debris.

7. How does oyster shell recycling benefit the environment?

Oyster shell recycling allows the shells to be reused to build new oyster reefs along our coast. This, in turn, promotes sustainable marine ecosystems by increasing oyster populations. Oysters filter water, improving its quality, while their reefs create habitats for fish, crabs, and other organisms. Additionally, oyster reefs act as a natural buffer against coastal erosion and storm surges.

8. How long until the new reef has oysters on it?

The time it takes for oysters to grow on an oyster reef can vary depending on several factors, including water temperature, food availability, and environmental conditions. On average, it can take 1 to 3 years or more for oysters to reach maturity on a reef.

9. Can businesses get involved in oyster shell recycling?

Absolutely! Many restaurants, seafood markets, and event organizers partner with local programs to recycle their shells. It's a great way for businesses to contribute to environmental sustainability and showcase their commitment to the community.

10. Are there any educational programs associated with oyster shell recycling?

Yes, many coastal communities offer educational programs to raise awareness about the importance of oyster shell recycling. These programs may include volunteer opportunities, workshops, presentations, and guided tours of oyster restoration sites.

11. What if there is not a recycling drop-off near me?

If there isn't a recycling drop-off near or convenient for you, please help us identify where there is a need for shell recycling in your area by emailing us at oysters@nccoast.org. While the North Carolina Coastal Federation can't guarantee that we can provide a drop-off in your area, your input will assist us in identifying high-demand locations.

12. How can I stay updated on oyster shell recycling efforts in Coastal North Carolina?

Stay connected with the Recycling for Reefs program through the North Carolina Coastal Federation's website, social media platforms, and newsletters.

13. Who can I contact if I have more questions?

Send us an email at Oysters@nccoast.org.