



North Carolina
Coastal Federation
Working Together for a Healthy Coast



**RECYCLE
FOR REEFS**

Key Messaging About Oysters & Oyster Shell Recycling

Not only do folks find oysters delicious, but they're a huge benefit to our economy, they also clean and filter coastal waters and provide valuable habitat to commercially and recreationally important fish. Just one oyster can filter 15-50 gallons of water a day.

Oysters are filter feeders. They absorb nutrients and pollutants in the water. For us to be able to eat oysters, we need clean water. Reducing stormwater runoff is critical to protecting the oysters. Capturing rain to soak into the ground instead of running off hardened surfaces is the most simple and effective way to reduce stormwater. More information and techniques on how to do this are in our publication, *Smart Yards*.

One way you can help oysters is to recycle oyster shells! Did you know it is illegal to throw away oyster shells in the state of North Carolina? Oyster shells must be taken to official recycling drop-off locations so we can properly and strategically put them back in the water in areas that are permitted by the state and federal government. These areas are typically more inclined to support the new growth of oysters. Baby oysters, or oyster spat, need a hard place to settle on and grow, and research proves they prefer oyster shells to anything else.

Oyster populations have decreased 85% on a global scale and estimates are 50-90% along our NC coast over the last 100 years. We must take every step necessary to protect and restore oyster populations, which in turn supports better water quality. Check out our website to learn more and find a recycling location near you.

Another way you can help is by adopting an oyster. Whether you adopt an individual or a bushel, that support directly benefits all of our oyster restoration work. Throughout the Federation's restoration season, the donor will receive four updates about the oyster's experience, from the recycled shell to a young adult beginning to filter water.

Fun Facts:

- The 3 F's! Oysters provide us with food, fish habitat, and filtered water

- “Every dollar invested in oyster restoration provides at least \$4.05 in benefits, such as increased economic activity through recreational activities and tourism, with jobs in fishing and restoration, and even in local seafood sales.”
 - <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2021/08/05/north-carolina-latest-oyster-blueprint-is-a-model-within-and-outside-the-state>
- Instead of using hardened structures like bulkheads, building living shorelines using recycled oyster shells stabilizes the banks, helping to control erosion while providing habitat, absorbing stormwater runoff, and promoting clean water through the growth of new oysters.
- Oysters can help protect our coast from storm surge and the damage from hurricanes. This natural infrastructure can increase our resilience to storms by strengthening and reinforcing our shorelines.