



CHATHAM SHELLFISH DEPARTMENT

MOST OFTEN ASKED SHELLFISH QUESTIONS

WHEN CAN I BUY A PERMIT AND HOW LONG ARE THEY VALID?

Family licenses may be purchased anytime after May 15th of each year and are good from June 1 through May 30. The Shellfish Department asks that each family keep track of their catch of shellfish on the reverse of the license and turn this catch report in at the end of each term, upon renewal of license. Fees: \$35 resident family; \$15 senior (over 70—must be resident or property owner in Chatham); \$100 non-resident family.

WHO MAY USE MY FAMILY SHELLFISH PERMIT?

Immediate members of family only: means married spouses and dependent(s), providing they are living in the same dwelling and the dependent has not reached the age of 21 and is living with and supported by the permit holder on a year-round basis. No friends or other relatives may shellfish on your license. Children under the age of 13 may accompany any adult with a valid family permit.

WHAT KIND OF IDENTIFICATION DO I NEED?

Permit holders must carry their shellfish permits on their persons when shellfishing as well as a picture identification. A photocopy of your driver's license is acceptable. Permits and identification must be shown when requested by Shellfish Constables. Constables shall also check size and quantity of shellfish.

HOW MUCH CAN I TAKE?

The holder of a family shellfish permit (resident or non-resident) may take up to a total of 32 quarts in any one week but **may not take more than** 12 quarts of any one species.***

For instance, you may take any of the following until it adds up to 32 quarts:

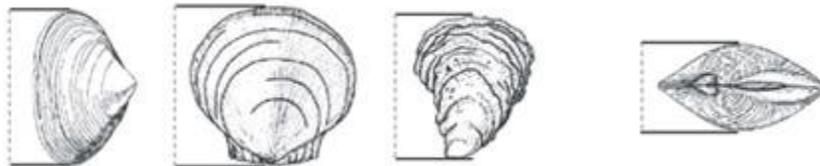
- (1) one 12-quart pail of softshell clams,
- (2) one 12-quart pail of quahaugs,
- (3) one 12-quart pail of mussels,
- (4) one 12-quart pail of razor clams,
- (5) one 12-quart pail of oysters (*in season only* from Oct. 1 through April 30),
- (6) one 32 qt. basket of scallops (*in season only* from Nov. 1 through March 31st),
- (7) one 16 quart basket (one-half bushel) of sea clams.

with the total catch **not exceeding** one bushel (32 quarts) in any one week (Sunday through the following Saturday).

***During scallop season (from November 1 through March 31), up to one bushel

(32 quarts) of scallops may be taken per week but your **total catch (including #1-5 above) may not exceed (32 quarts).**

HOW DO I MEASURE?



Shell Diameter

surf clam, softshell clam, sea scallop, oyster, mussel

Shell Thickness

quahaugs

Quahaugs must be one (1) inch in shell thickness or hinge width as measured by 1" measuring device.

Softshell clams and mussels must be two (2) inches long, or longer. A two-inch ring for measuring must be used by permit holder.

In season only:

Oysters must be three (3) inches long, or longer. A three-inch ring for measuring must be used by permit holder.

Scallops must be adult scallops with a well-defined growth ring or raised annulus.

Sea clams must measure 5" in length.

No person shall take, or have in their possession, any of the following: seed clams, seed oysters, seed scallops, seed quahaugs, seed mussels, seed sea clams. All shellfish shall immediately be culled when harvested (i.e. measured before putting in your basket), and all seed shellfish immediately returned alive to the coastal waters and flats whence taken.

HOW DOES THE SHELLFISH WARDEN INSPECT MY CATCH?

Any shellfish you have in your basket or pail is your legal catch, so be sure to measure each piece *before* you put it in the basket.

ARE THERE ANY SHELLFISH AREAS CLOSED?

Areas closed are posted on the bulletin board at the Permit Department, Town Hall, and the Shellfish Department. Signs are posted in areas of closure but occasionally disappear, so you must be aware of closures. Up to date information is posted on the Town of Chatham website under the Shellfish Department.

WHAT ARE THE HOURS OF OPERATION FOR SHELLFISHING?

Shellfishing is allowed ½ hour before sunrise to ½ after sunset 7 days a week.

WHAT DO I NEED TO GO SHELLFISHING?

All shellfishing requires a permit. In addition, certain tools will make the harvest more rewarding. Here are some useful tools:

SHELLFISH TYPE	TOOL NEEDED	REASON
Quahogs	Long handled tool with curved tines at the base (with or without basket)	Allows the digger to stand and scratch the surface to a depth of six inches, which is where the animals can be found.
Steamer Clams (Soft Shell) Razor Clams	A short handled hoe, which has tines of about 12 inches in length.	Allows the digger to dig a trench about 10 inches deep and uncover the clams.
Oysters Scallops Mussels	May be harvested by hand or using a quahog scratcher	These animals do not burrow. They live on the surface and may be harvested by hand. When searching for these species, be mindful of the fact that your activity will likely turn the water muddy (Much of the technique uses the sense of feel).

Shellfishing can be done by long-rake, scratcher, tong or clam-hoe only. No shovels, pitchforks, garden spades, etc. are allowed.

Be sure to protect your feet with boots or old sneakers. Broken shell fragments can inflict a serious cut.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CLAM AND A QUAHOG?

What's in a name? The Native American name for the hard shell clam (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) is Quahog (also spelled quahaug, quohog and others) and the name is unique to the Cape and Islands region, as well as Rhode Island. Elsewhere, along the East Coast, it is referred to as a "clam". Locally, the term "clam" is used to describe the soft shell or steamer clam (*Mya arenaria*). Just to confuse matters further, the younger, smallest (barely legal size) quahog is designated *Littleneck*. Somewhat larger specimens of the same animal are called *Cherrystone*. Both are typically eaten on the half shell. The largest quahogs are called *Chowders*.

IS SHELLFISH SAFE TO EAT?

The waters from which shellfish may be harvested are tested on a regular basis to insure public safety. This protocol is established by Federal guidelines and is implemented by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Should the index exceed the threshold for safety, then the area will be closed to harvest and will be posted and patrolled. Eating raw shellfish may pose potential health risk for some individuals and consumers should be mindful of the potential health effects. Occasionally, persons may have allergic reactions to eating shellfish.

WHAT ARE THE BEST WAYS TO TRANSPORT AND KEEP SHELLFISH?

After leaving the water, shellfish should be transported in air (not in water) as cool as possible (not frozen). Shellfish should be kept in the refrigerator in a non-airtight container. This is because there is much more oxygen in air than in water. Returning shellfish to waters other than where they were harvested is not allowed.

HOW DO I TELL IF A SHELLFISH IS ALIVE?

Shellfish are alive if the shells are closed and cannot be pulled open. If they are alive and their shells are open, they will close when you pick them up.