

Tips to Stay Healthy

Shellfish harvested from polluted waters and areas of sewage discharge have higher levels of disease-causing organisms. As harvesters, you already know to check which areas are closed to shell fishing. These waters are tested for certain bacteria and are only closed to protect human health.

- Don't harvest from polluted waters. All harvesting is prohibited in closed areas.
- Don't discharge sewage into the water.
- Store out of the sun, covered if possible
- Protect shellfish from contamination. Store away from bilge water, fuel oil, and other chemicals.
- **Do not consume clams or mussels floating in ocean waters.** They are likely to have filtered much more algae-containing water than those from flats or beds, and therefore will usually have much higher concentrations of toxin.

Fresh shellfish should not be kept uncooked for much over a week.

Keep shellfish fresh by storing in an open container covered with a damp towel in a refrigerator or cooler.

Resources

Marine Resources
State of Maine
<http://www.maine.gov/dmr/msf/>

Municipal Shellfish Program, DMR,
P.O. Box 8, West Boothbay Harbor,



Shellfish Safety

What To Know Before You Dig

Blue Mussels

Blue mussels have smooth, equally-shaped, bluish-black "D" shaped shells that are linked together on one side by a hinge. The inside of the shell is pearly violet or white. The meat inside the shell can be a creamy color, pink or orange. Projecting out from between the shells on one side is a bundle of tough, brown fibers called byssal threads, more commonly known as the beard. Mussels use these fibers to anchor themselves to stationary objects.

The cold waters of the north Atlantic and Pacific oceans provide the ideal habitat for blue mussels. Cultured mussels do not touch the ocean bottom and feed off the nutrient-rich water that surrounds them. They taste sweeter, are plumper, more tender, have thinner shells, and yield a higher amount of meat than their wild counterparts. They are also free of the grit that often spoils the taste of wild mussels harvested from the ocean floor.

Like most bivalve shellfish, blue mussels are filter feeders. They eat by pumping and filtering water through gill filaments which filter out small particles.

Clams

Soft-shell clams popularly called "steamers", "softshells", "longnecks", "piss clams", "Ipswich clams", or "Essex clams" are a species of edible saltwater clam, a marine bivalve mollusk. These clams live buried in the mud on tidal mudflats. They are well known as a food item on the coast of Maine, however the range extends much farther north to Canada and south to the Southern states.

Clamming is restricted to hand harvesting, with the exception of transplanting operations done by municipalities. Clamming while diving is prohibited. There is a statewide 2" minimum size. The state conducts an extensive public health monitoring effort for clam flats. Samples are examined for bacterial pollution and toxic algae on an ongoing basis and those flats that are classified as conditional are opened and closed based on rainfall. Clams, and other bivalves living in coastal tide flats, are filter feeders. They acquire nutrients from plankton which they absorb from sea water they siphon through their digestive tract. If the water that covers the clam flat at high tide is contaminated with fecal bacterial pollution, clams can accumulate unhealthy levels of bacteria.

Red Tide

The harvesting and processing of clams is strictly regulated due to various bacteria and toxins that can occasionally be found in clams. Maine closely monitors its clam flats for the presence of these toxins. When the levels get too high the state agency will close the flats in that area to prevent the harvesting of clams. Do not harvest or eat shellfish from a closed area. Cooking the shellfish will not make them safe to eat.

Typically these elevated levels of bacteria result from heavy rains or red tide. "Red tide" is a form of sea algae that is eaten by clams and can be dangerous to humans. If you feel sick after eating shell fish contact Call the Northern New England Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 or go the your local hospital.