

Quality

To ensure a top-quality product, the shell should be unbroken, should not gape and should close readily when tapped. If the shell does not close tightly or the oyster meat is dry when the shell is open, the product should be discarded.



The meat of shucked oysters is usually a creamy tan color, plump, and should smell fresh and mild.

An oyster's diet or certain environmental conditions may cause the oyster to take on other colorations. Oysters that have filtered certain microscopic organisms as food may have a reddish or greenish coloration. Pigments from these microorganisms may dissolve in water and are sometimes seen in the liquor. These discolorations are harmless and disappear when the product is cooked. However, a pink discoloration in oysters accompanied by an offensive odor is caused by the presence of yeast. Such oysters should be discarded.

Oysters may be eaten safely during any time of the year. However, oysters are highly perishable and can spoil quickly in the hot summer months if they are not properly refrigerated. Raw and cooked oysters should be handled separately to avoid possible cross contamination.

For more information and specific regulations, please contact:

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Cooking and Safety

Oysters are good to eat all year long, but are in best condition and most tasty in the fall, winter and early spring. Raw oysters have a protein content of about 9 percent and a fat content of less than 2 percent. One-half pound of raw oysters contains about 150 calories. The cholesterol content of oysters is 50 milligrams/100 grams of meat, and the sodium content is 109 milligrams/100 grams. Oysters are also very high in iron content.

Consumer Information Message

As in the case with consuming other raw animal protein products, there is a risk associated with consuming raw oysters, clams and mussels. If you suffer from chronic illness of the liver, stomach, or blood, or have immune disorders, do not eat these products raw.

Once an oyster has been removed from its shell (shucked), the meat can be completely consumed. It is one of the few meats that can be eaten raw. Oysters harvested from approved waters, packed under sanitary conditions and properly refrigerated are usually safe for raw consumption by healthy individuals.

Vibrio vulnificus is a bacterium found naturally in coastal waters. *Vibrio vulnificus* is NOT a result of pollution. However, for some people with certain health conditions, eating raw or undercooked oysters or clams can cause serious illness or even death from *Vibrio vulnificus*.

Cooking oysters to an internal temperature of 140° F or greater for 4-6 minutes destroys the common microorganisms of public health concern. This Coast cuisine can be eaten on the half-shell, fried, smoked, baked, roasted, broiled, sautéed, poached and steamed, and can be found in stew, soup, gumbo, dressing and seafood casseroles and on the menus of most local seafood restaurants.

For more information about cooking and safety, please visit the Interstate Shellfish Sanitation Conference website at www.issc.org

Gone Oystering



with the



**Mississippi Department
of Marine Resources**

The American oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) grows best in shallow estuarine waters that rapidly change in temperature and salinity. Oysters are filter feeders, with a single oyster filtering up to 50 gallons of water per day.

History

Oystering in Mississippi dates from more than 10,000 years ago when Indians first gathered oysters by hand in shallow coastal waters.

As European settlers established colonies on the Coast, they harvested, sold, traded and ate the abundant seafood present there, including oysters. Some of these settlers constructed their houses from a mixture of clay, Spanish moss and oyster shell applied to heavy timber.

Beginning in the late 1800s, the seafood industry prospered because of the railroad, canneries, and the invention of "artificial ice" produced by mechanical refrigeration, making it possible to ship seafood to other parts of the country. Biloxi came to be known as the "Oyster Capitol of the World."

Did you know?

Oysters exist as either male or female sexes and can change their sex. A single female oyster may release 100 million eggs each time she spawns and may spawn several times a year. Oyster larvae pass through several free-swimming developmental stages before attaching to a suitable substrate such as clean shell or rock. A Mississippi oyster usually takes 18-24 months to reach a 3-inch legal size.

Oysters are often preyed upon by other marine animals such as the southern oyster drill, crabs and black drum and have to compete for food with organisms such as barnacles and hooked mussels.

Management

The Department of Marine Resources (DMR) enhances or establishes new oyster reefs through a program of cultivation, planting and relaying. *Cultivation* breaks up larger clusters of oysters and exposes clean shell where oyster larvae may attach. *Planting* involves obtaining suitable "cultch" material (shell, limestone, crushed concrete, etc.) and spreading it in a thin layer over the water bottom, also providing oyster larvae a suitable home. *Relaying* involves moving oysters from one area where they are plentiful, to an area where they are sparse.



Shell planting improves fishing and oyster production in the state for present and future generations.

The DMR is also responsible for properly classifying the growing areas for oyster harvest. This involves collecting and analyzing water samples from the area under various environmental conditions, conducting water quality and hydrographic surveys in the watersheds impacting the area, and analyzing the data.



Reef assessment surveys are conducted by scuba divers and with bottom sampling gear. Estimates of the amount and condition of the oysters allow specific management recommendations to be made to the Commission on Marine Resources.

24-hour Oyster Information Hotline

Information about the opening and closure of areas and reefs is available by calling the DMR 24-hour Oyster Information Hotline at 1-800-385-5902.

Harvest

Most of the commercially harvested oysters in Mississippi come from the reefs in the western Mississippi Sound, primarily from the Pass Marianne, Telegraph, St. Joseph's and Pass Christian reefs.

A licensed oysterman can use a set of tongs to scoop oysters off the bottom of the Mississippi Sound. Tongs resemble two rakes attached to two long poles that work like scissors and catch oysters.

For larger harvest, an oyster dredge can be used to harvest oysters. The dredge is a basket or net attached to a toothed bar. It is towed by boat over a reef and oysters are scraped off the bottom by the bar, caught in the basket and hauled aboard by a mechanical winch. A separate dredging license is required to harvest oysters in this fashion.

Some oyster areas are closed after rainfall or during high riverstage conditions. Areas may also be closed to harvest for any other reason when water quality may affect the safety and quality of the oysters.

Oysters may be taken only from those waters approved safe for harvest by the Commission on Marine Resources and only during open season. The harvesting, shucking, processing and sale of oysters must also conform to all state regulations. Before oystering, a recreational or commercial license must be purchased from the DMR.