

Brief history of the Maine oyster

Ancient shell heaps (or middens) left by ancestors of the native Wabanaki people and fossil oyster shells are evidence that oysters were once much more widespread in the Gulf of Maine. Oyster populations declined due to natural environmental change and pollution from human activities, although remnant populations survived into the twentieth century. In 1949, the state began efforts to re-establish oyster populations, by introducing the European oyster, an effort that was largely unsuccessful. UMaine researcher Herb Hidu brought hatchery technology to the Darling Marine Center in the 1970s and trained Maine's first oyster farmers. In the 1990s, faculty and students re-focused on the native species, *Crassostrea virginica*, developing ways to breed oysters that were better adapted to Maine's cold waters.

The Maine oyster today

Oysters are now a \$5 million industry, with dozens of farms producing more than 2,000,000 pounds of cultured American oysters. Maine has two commercial shellfish hatcheries; oyster farmers purchase juvenile oyster 'seed' or 'spat' from them, and raise the oysters to market size, using a number of different techniques. Some place the juvenile shellfish in plastic mesh bags or cages that float on the water surface; others suspend oysters in trays or cages in the water. Some growers may take small hatchery seed and grow it bigger in bottom cages or bags before free planting on the bottom. They are ready to harvest in two to three years. In several areas, cultured American oysters have reproduced on their own, leading to wild populations that are harvested by licensed commercial fishermen.

Keep oysters cold!

Purchased oysters should be stored in the refrigerator, packed loosely and covered with a damp towel. Eat within 14 days.

Oysters in the market and on the menu are safe, when purchased from a certified shellfish dealer. The old adage about not eating oysters in months without an "R" comes from the days when refrigeration was much less available than today.

Water quality is one of the biggest concerns of the oyster farmer. While the filter-feeding oysters themselves actually help to keep the water clear, oysters are vulnerable to bacterial pollution, chemical contamination, and harmful algal blooms (red tide), especially during spring through fall. Check with the Department of Marine Resources for shellfish growing area closures; 800.232.4733 or 207.624.7727.

Eating raw oysters presents some risk of exposure to viruses and bacteria, especially for people with compromised immune systems.

Where to eat

List is not complete; check oystertrailmaine.org for the latest updates!

Roberts Maine Grill, Kittery
 Mine Oyster Raw Bar, Boothbay Harbor
 Hurricane Restaurant, Kennebunkport
 Newcastle Publik House, Newcastle
 River Bottom Oyster Bar, Newcastle
 Schooner Landing, Damariscotta
 King Eider's Pub, Damariscotta
 Damariscotta River Grill, Damariscotta
 The Anchor, Round Pond
 The Slipway, Thomaston
 Pearl Restaurant, Rockland
 Cafe Miranda, Rockland
 Old Port Sea Grill & Raw Bar, Portland
 Eventide Oyster Co., Portland
 Fore Street, Portland
 Boone's Fish House and Oyster Room, Portland
 Scales, Portland
 BP's Shuck Shack, Portland
 J's Oyster Bar, Portland
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555, Portland
 Oysters, S. Portland
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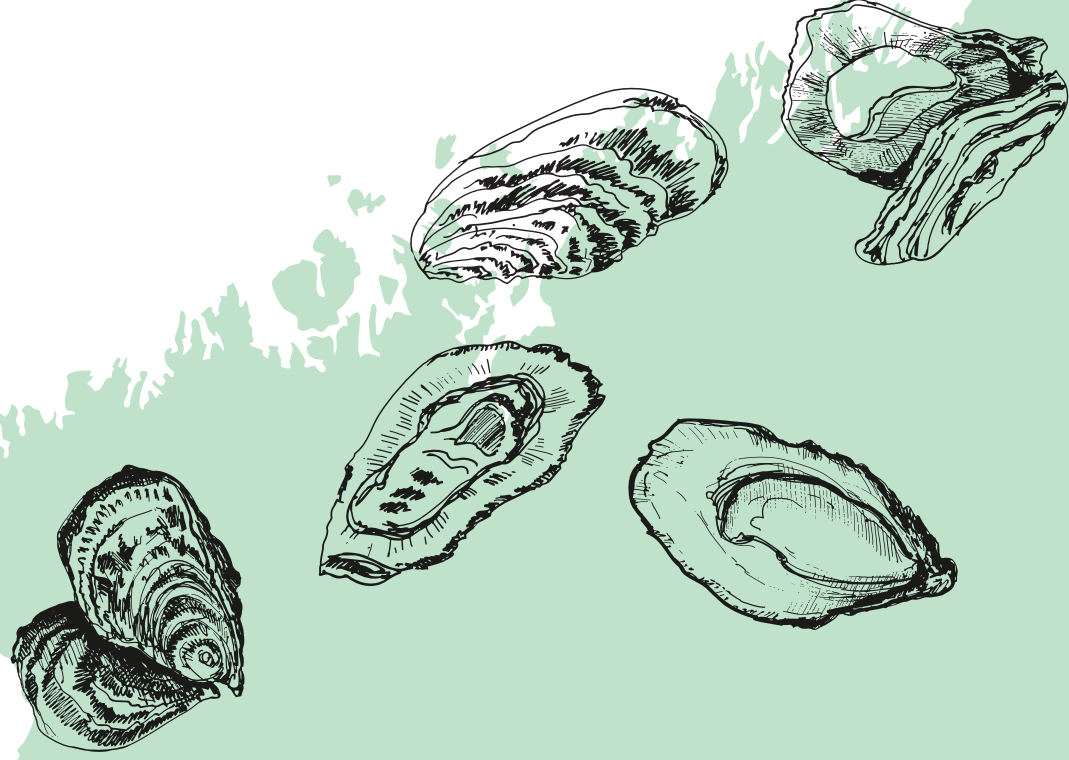
Where can I buy Maine oysters?

Maine oysters are available year-round, directly from some oyster farms (indicated by a \$ on the map) and from local seafood markets, including: JP Shellfish, Eliot
 Harbor Fish Market, Portland
 Browns Trading Market, Portland
 Free Range Fish & Lobster, Portland

About the Oyster Trail

The Oyster Trail of Maine is an ongoing initiative of Maine Sea Grant, University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Maine Aquaculture Association, Maine Aquaculture Innovation Center, and In A Half Shell. Learn more and access an online map at oystertrailmaine.org.

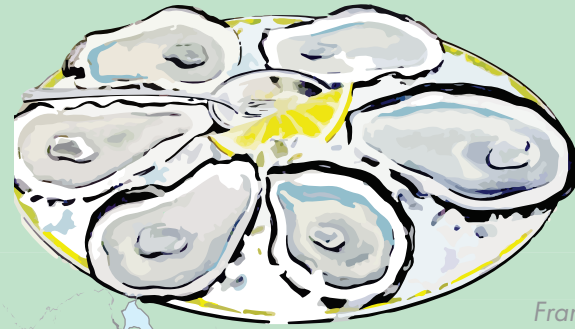
The Oyster Trail of Maine



oystertrailmaine.org



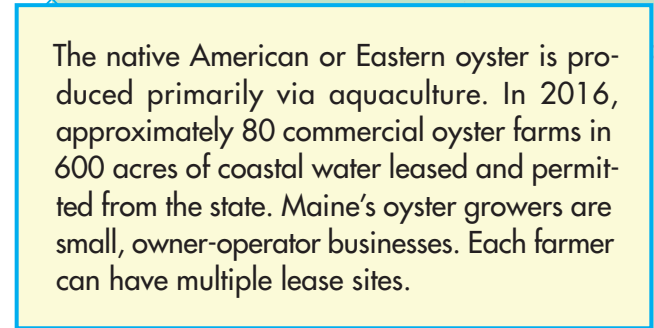
The Oyster Trail of Maine



The native American or Eastern oyster is produced primarily via aquaculture. In 2016, approximately 80 commercial oyster farms in 600 acres of coastal water leased and permitted from the state. Maine's oyster growers are small, owner-operator businesses. Each farmer can have multiple lease sites.

Most Maine oyster farms grow the same species, *Crassostrea virginica*, although some production of the European flat or Belon oyster (*Ostrea edulis*) also occurs. Oysters vary widely in appearance due to their growing conditions. Oysters feed by filtering algae and other particles from the water. The look and taste of oysters varies from river to river depending on what kind of algae they eat, culture technique, and water flow, temperature and salinity. Maine's clean, cold waters produce high quality oysters. Market names vary, though typically correspond to the growing location.

- Oyster farm locations; labels indicate trail participants
- \$ Direct sales from the farm
- + Offers tours (contact company for details)

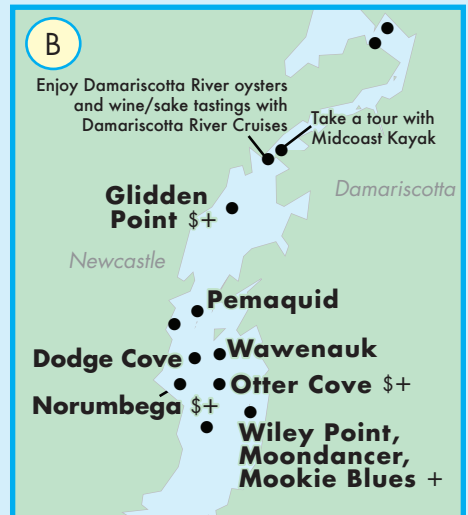


See inset "A"

See inset "B"



A



B

Please note...
Oyster farms are private businesses. Please call ahead before visiting and be respectful of farmers at work on the water.

Explore the Oyster Trail

Explore the Oyster Trail ~ learn where to eat and buy Maine oysters, take a tour of an oyster farm, and learn more about this \$5 million industry that is part of Maine's working waterfront.

Visit oystertrailmaine.org for details.

Produced by Maine Sea Grant; map by College of the Atlantic GIS Laboratory. Map not intended for navigation. For more information on lease holders and locations, visit maine.gov/dmr/aquaculture/index.html