

**Range Map**

(Provided by FAO Fisheries & Agriculture)

# EASTERN OYSTERS

## *Crassostrea virginica*

### FACT ONE



Oysters are **filter feeders** and help keep our bays clean as they feed on tiny algae. A single oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of seawater per day!

### FACT TWO



Oysters are born as swimming **larvae**, then settle onto a hard surface, like another shell becoming **spat**, never to move again!

### FACT THREE



New York Harbor was once the largest source of edible oysters in the entire world! Now most oysters are farmed.

### FACT FOUR



Oysters naturally cement themselves together forming **oyster reefs**, which protect against erosion and flooding.

For more information about Oysters:

<http://ccesuffolk.org/marine/aquaculture>

<https://www.billionoysterproject.org/>



## Background

Oysters are classified as bivalves, meaning two shells. They belong to the mollusk phylum, along with their cousins clams, snails, and even octopus, most of which make a hard shell of limestone. Oysters feed by removing microscopic algae, phytoplankton, from the water and sort it using a gill. In the first days of life, swimming larval oysters cement down onto hard surfaces forming spat.

## Summary

Oysters provide many "ecosystem services." They filter bay water, letting light penetrate to the bottom grass habitats. They provide food for humans as well as birds, crabs, fish, and snails. Oysters engineer ecosystems as they grow into large reef structures, which protect against erosion and buffer storm surges.

## Status

Wild Eastern Oysters went through a population crash throughout the 20th century, due mainly to overharvesting and water pollution. Thanks to pollution regulations our local waters can support oysters again, so CCE and other organizations raise oysters through aquaculture. These oysters provide food and an opportunity to repopulate the wild to build new oyster reefs.

## How You Can Help

Anything you do to help the bays, helps oysters. Reduce pollution, especially near drains that flow into bays. Buy local oysters or even become an oyster farmer yourself!

Volunteer with our aquaculture efforts at [lshellfishrestorationproject.org/volunteer](https://lshellfishrestorationproject.org/volunteer)

Visit [ccesuffolk.org/marine/SPAT](https://ccesuffolk.org/marine/SPAT) for our community oyster growing program.

*A female oyster can produce over 100 million eggs in one spawn! In the wild most don't survive, but through the aquaculture process, "seed" oysters are protected from predators and fed plenty of algae to increase survival.*

