

Shellfish Gardening

What is a Shellfish Garden?

Similar to a traditional garden, a shellfish garden involves planting baby clams, oysters and mussels on tidelands for personal consumption. In a shellfish garden, tideland owners grow non-commercial shellfish for their own use, providing fresh and delicious seafood and valuable ecosystem services for cleaner Puget Sound waters. Shellfish gardening can be done by individuals or as a community.

Why become a shellfish gardener?

Shellfish gardening is a great way to produce your own food while helping to improve Puget Sound water quality. Shellfish are filter feeders, meaning they filter local waters and help cycle nutrients, which is helpful in decreasing pollution common across Puget Sound.

What do I need to get started?

- Tidelands
- Shellfish "seeds"
- Growing bags or cages
- Rope
- Stakes

How do I create a shellfish garden?

1. A shellfish garden involves "planting" certified shellfish seeds in grow bags and securing them to the beach.
2. Gather materials and buy seed from a certified seed supplier – oysters typically cost about \$30 for 500 oyster seeds. **Never buy seeds from the internet as they may be unsafe due to diseases or pests.**

TIP: Plant your seeds within 1-2 days of picking them up, and keep them in a cool, moist area until planting.

3. Fill the growing bag or cage with shellfish seeds. The seeds require another surface, such as oyster shells, to settle on. Once the seeds permanently attach to a surface, they're known as spat.
4. Secure growing bag or cage in the water. There are multiple methods available to do this. The growing bag can be suspended off a dock or float, suspended on stakes, or anchored to the bottom.



EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL SHELLFISH GARDENS IN SOUTH SOUND

The Henderson Inlet Community Shellfish Farm is a great example of partners and residents joining hands to restore clean water and cultivate fresh seafood. The community hosts monthly work parties to do tide work, gear maintenance, pruning, and run the neighborhood Farm Stand.

Evergreen Shellfish Club is a student-run oyster garden on Eld Inlet. This Shellfish Garden raises Pacific oysters and is used for hands-on teaching about water quality impacts of oysters. They host work parties every other weekend that are open to all members of the Evergreen Community.

TIP: Early summer is the best time to plant oysters.

TIP: The bag should be in a location with good tidal flow (ideally, +4 to -1 feet Mean Lower Low Water.)

5. Maintain your oysters by clearing any growth on the bag or cage, removing crabs or anything else that may have gotten inside, and checking the bag seal and lines.
6. Harvest! Depending on the species, oysters take between 1-2 years to reach a harvestable size, and clams can be harvested yearly. **Always check with the Washington State Department of Health recreational shellfish safety map for updates on water quality before consuming your shellfish:**
<https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/eh/maps/biotoxin/biotoxin.html>

What should I plant?

The following species can be safely planted in Puget Sound:

- Pacific Oysters
- Manila clams
- Mussels



Where can I buy "seeds"?

Never buy shellfish from the internet, as many species are prohibited and can be harmful to the Puget Sound ecosystem.

Puget Sound Restoration Fund, Bainbridge Island

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Taylor Shellfish Farms Seed Sales

→ **CONTACT** Taylor Shellfish Farms for more information (Marcelle@taylorshellfish.com; 360-426-6178)