

WHERE AND HOW TO CRAB. Crabbing is permitted in Toms Cove, along the shore near Assateague bridge and along the roadside in Swan Cove. Occasionally, during extremely high tides or storms, salt water carrying blue crab larvae will flood into the brackish waters of Swan Cove. Crabs grow faster than normal when absorbing water of low salt content - however, high salinity is needed for spawning. Ask about the current status of these areas before crabbing.

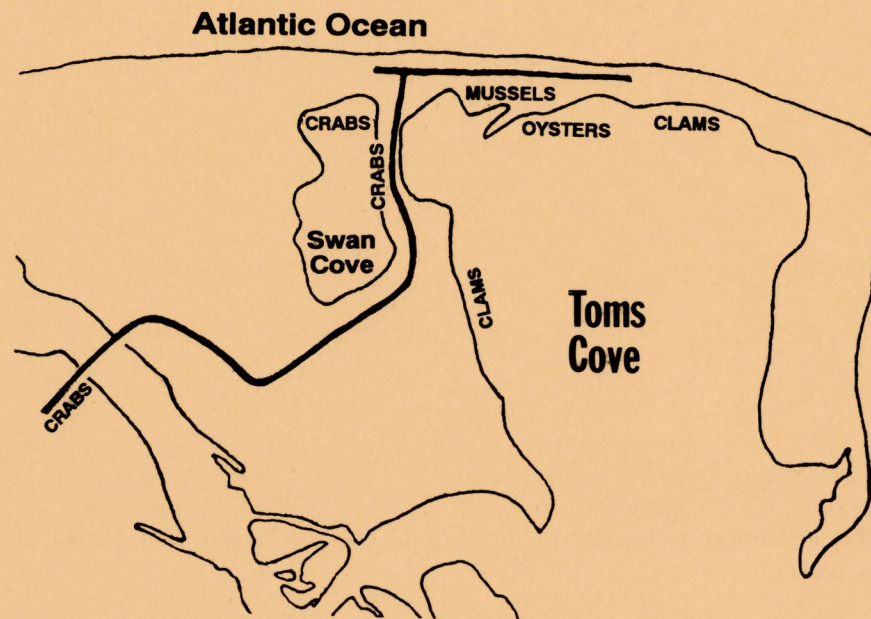


The easiest and most common method of crabbing requires a piece of string, bait, net and container. Attach a piece of bony chicken or fish head to the string and cast out; gradually pull in the string when a tug is felt. With luck a crab will be hanging onto the bait and can be retrieved with a net. Turn the net over and gently shake the crab into a bucket or container. Store in a cool, shady, waterless container until needed. **NEVER COOK A DEAD CRAB - THROW IT OUT!** Bacteria quickly accumulates in all dead shellfish.

A single crab trap or pot, tended at all times, is permitted. Attach bait to the center of the trap and pull up the trap as soon as a crab walks in. This method works well in clear, shallow water where the trap can be observed.

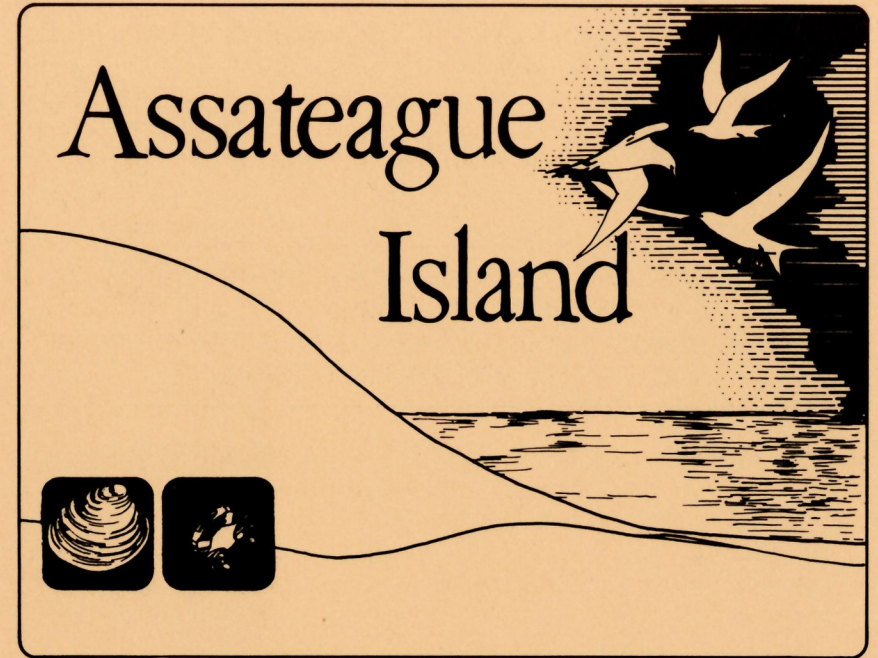
REGULATIONS. Crabbing does not require a license and there is no closed season (June through September is best). Limits are one bushel per person per day. Males must measure 5" from point to point. There are no size limits for mature females, however, immature females must measure 5" from point to point. We recommend that you throw back any egg bearing females or "sponge crabs."

SHELLFISHING AREAS. As shown on the map, crabbing is best in Swan Cove and at the Assateague bridge. Clams, oysters and mussels inhabit different parts of Toms Cove. All shellfish are more abundant in outlying areas.



SPECIAL NOTE:

- Those persons with a known shellfish allergy should not experiment with personally harvested or restaurant served shellfish. Be aware some local restaurants include shellfish in many of their dishes.
- We encourage the thorough cooking of ALL shellfish before consumption. Uncooked seafood of any type can possibly contain high levels of bacteria.



SHELLFISHING IN TOMS COVE

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



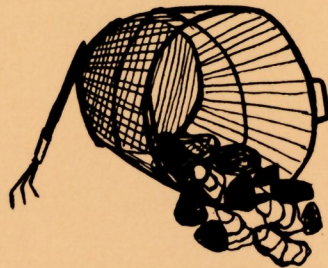
WHAT ARE SHELLFISH? The term "shellfish" refers to all mollusks and crustaceans, some of which are very tasty. This brochure focuses on those most popular around Assateague, including the quahog (hard shell) clam, ribbed mussel, Virginia oyster and blue crab. With a little time and effort you can enjoy a smorgasbord of edible shellfish from Assateague's unpolluted waters. Use the map on the back of this brochure to find the best shellfishing areas. Be sure to ask about present conditions.

MUCH OF TOMS COVE, BELOW THE LOW TIDE MARK, ENCOMPASSES PRIVATELY LEASED BOTTOM LAND. HOWEVER, UNLESS THESE GROUNDS ARE PHYSICALLY POSTED, IT IS LEGAL TO SHELLFISH IN THESE AREAS.

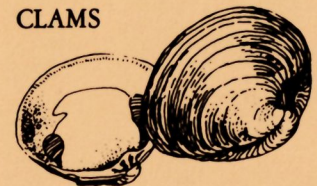
BEFORE YOU GO . . . Make sure you understand all the rules and regulations of shellfishing at Assateague. Wear shoes to avoid stepping on sharp shell pieces or glass. Be prepared for sun, heat, cold, insects and tide changes. Bring a container for your catch and an inflatable swim ring if you want your container to float. NEVER attach a bag of shellfish to your body.

DEEP WATER POCKETS EXIST IN TOMS COVE AND LOSS OF FOOTING IS POSSIBLE IN THESE AREAS. BE CAREFUL!

BOUNTIFUL BIVALVES. Clams, oysters and mussels belong to a group of mollusks known as "bivalves". Like other mollusks, such as whelks and moon snails, bivalves protect their soft body by extracting calcium from sea water to build shells. Bivalves have two shell halves which completely enclose the animal. Bivalves feed by filtering food particles from the surrounding water with siphon tubes that extend from their bodies. Since each bivalve has a different lifestyle, techniques for collecting them will vary.

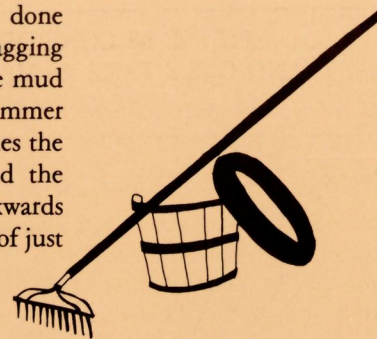


CLAMS



Quahog clams live in the mud and sand bottom of Toms Cove, usually three or four inches deep. Some clammers "sign" for clams by looking for holes or signs in the mud at low tide that show where the clams are feeding. Shaped like old fashioned keyholes, signs are made by the clam's siphon tubes filtering in water from above the mud. This method is good for locating the highly prized "cherrystone" or small quahog clam. Dig the clams out with a hand trowel, knife, large spoon or any digging tool.

RAKING is an easier task, which can be done during any tide. Rakers find clams by dragging the deep tines of special rakes through the mud until the tines scrape a shell. Then the clammer digs up the mud, shakes it loose and catches the clam in the basket. To use a rake, hold the handle behind your back and walk backwards - this way your body does the work instead of just your arms. Scrub clams well before using.



NOTE: Limits for clams are 250 clams a day per person. Allow clams to briefly filter out sand and grit in a container of salt water - keep dry and cool otherwise. NEVER COOK DEAD SHELLFISH! If you find a clam, mussel or oyster with its shell open, throw it away!

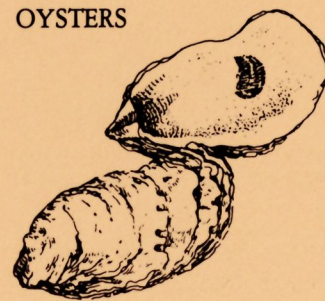
MUSSELS



The ribbed mussel is easier to find than the clam because the top part of the shell sticks up above the mud. Ribbed mussels prefer the wet, low areas of a salt marsh and the banks of marsh creeks (guts). Since mussels attach themselves to plants and other mussels with strong filaments called byssus threads, a hand trowel, knife or other sturdy digging tool will be needed to dig them out. There is no limit to the number of mussels you may take; however, please take only what you will consume.

NOTE: Mussels are exposed at low tide and close up completely, preventing them from filtering out their waste products. Since these waste products could cause illness in humans, we strongly recommend that you take mussels only when they are covered with water and filtering their wastes. Prepare them as soon as possible.

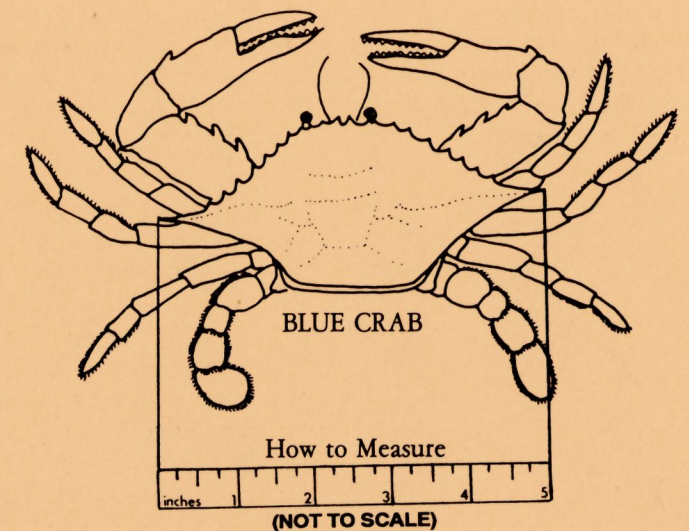
OYSTERS



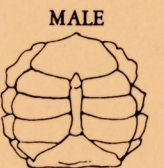
This valuable shellfish is good to eat any time of the year. However, because oysters reproduce during warmer months, it is advised they be collected during the cooler seasons. Check at the Visitor Center for current regulations. Oysters attach themselves permanently to hard objects (usually other oysters and shells) and can easily be picked up from the salt marsh guts and banks of the cove. Oyster limits are a bushel per person per day.

PLEASE BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHER VISITORS
AND ONLY TAKE AS MANY SHELLFISH AS YOU NEED.
TREAT HABITATS WITH CARE!

THE CRAFTY BLUE CRAB. With its dark olive green back, bright blue claws, and feisty temper, this expert swimmer is one of Assateague's best known (and delicious) creatures.

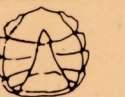


Crabs begin life as tiny larvae, then grow rapidly by repeatedly shedding their shells - often reaching adult size within a year. At maturity, the blue crab is a colorful animal between 5" and 7" wide. Sexes are easy to tell apart by the shape of the crab's "apron" or abdomen. Mature females carry up to two million orange eggs beneath the apron - such crabs are called "sponge crabs". Crabs only spawn in salt water, yet young crabs thrive and grow to their largest size in brackish water. After maturing, crabs are known to live at least one more year and some live for three years. Males live a little longer than females. Equipped with powerful claws and the ability to swim, blue crabs are skilled predators as well as scavengers - watch your fingers to avoid a painful nip!



MALE

IMMATURE FEMALE



MATURE FEMALE

