

Caring For Your Oysters

As oyster stewards, the care you provide your young spat is crucial. While the wire cages protect the developing oysters from predators and burial in the mud or sandy bottom, you are needed to fully protect the spat until it is time to relocate them on an oyster sanctuary reef next spring. Periodic cleaning and attention to how the cages are hanging from your pier will enhance oyster growth & survival.

Oyster Facts

- Oysters less than a year old are called "spat"
- Oysters grow an average 1 inch per year
- Oysters can change sex.
- An oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water per day in warm water.

HANGING YOUR CAGES

Cages should be tied off about one foot below the surface of the water at low tide: this will keep the oysters in the water and alive. If the tide drops lower than normal, brief exposure to the air is not an issue as long as the air temperature is above freezing. In the winter it is essential that the oysters remain underwater whenever there is a chance of freezing air temperatures. Winter tides can drop very low so careful observation is needed to make sure the oysters are always in the water.

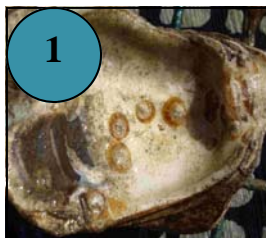
CARE AND MAINTENANCE

- Maintenance for your oyster cages is minimal. Cleaning once every 2 weeks is recommended for optimal growth. Simply dunk the cages in and out of the water, like steeping a tea bag. Jostling will remove silt and algae, which can smother the spat.
- If you observe heavy fouling on the cage, rinse with a garden hose and possibly use a scrub brush to remove the build-up. Heavy fouling restricts water flow and oyster growth.
- Another option is to let the cage sit out of water for up to 2 hours, during which time the fouling organisms will dry out and die. This can be done up to once a week during warmer months, but oysters should never be exposed to heat for longer than 2 hours or they may die.
- If oysters sit too long without a rinse or jostle, they may begin to grow through the wire mesh of the cage. It then becomes difficult to remove them without breaking their young shells and killing the oysters. Frequent cleaning will help prevent this!
- During cold winter months, the spat will go dormant and no cleaning is necessary. Be sure to resume cleaning when the weather warms up, however!



Fouled cage (left) versus clean cage

WHAT TO EXPECT:



Above: Summer 2010, Tiny spat cling to old shell



Above: Fall 2010, Adolescent spat getting larger



Left: Spring 2011, Year-old spat taking mature shape

Oyster beds are home to many organisms



Enjoy your micro-reef!



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