



DELAWARE CENTER FOR THE  
**INLAND BAYS**

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# Oyster Gardening

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Project Status: Current

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## Resources for Current CIB Oyster Gardeners

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Learn the Basics

*For fullscreen, click the bottom right corner of the video box.*

## About the Program

The Center's Oyster Gardening program is a restoration project that employs waterfront property owners to raise small amounts of oysters in the waters that surround their docks and bulkheads. The Center provides juvenile oysters and gear to raise them; the "gardeners" provide basic husbandry and grow them for about one year, when they will then be used in restoration projects.

The program began in 2003 through a generous grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation's Five-star Restoration Challenge Grant Program. The program brings together scientists and volunteers in an effort to restore the American Oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) to the waters of Delaware's Inland Bays. The program is now a cooperative effort between the CIB, the Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program, the Town of South Bethany and volunteers!

The Oyster Gardening program employs volunteer gardeners to care for small "spat", growing them to adult size by practicing basic husbandry techniques. Each gardener is responsible for one site, and each site grows approximately one-hundred oysters, using spat stocks and gear provided by the CIB.

Oyster larvae used in the program are hatchery produced at the Rutgers University Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory, using broodstock lines bred for resistance to MSX and Dermo disease. In the hatchery, a million or more microscopic oyster larvae are exposed to spent oyster shell to imitate the natural "setting" process. During early summer, trays of oyster shell with fingernail sized spat are then distributed throughout the Inland Bays to the gardeners for grow-out in their Taylor Floats. Gardeners will be in possession of the oysters for one year, when CIB will remove them and place them in various restoration or research projects throughout the bays.

***Oyster Gardening oysters are not grown for food and are not suitable for human consumption.***

## Objectives:

- **Research** on oysters and prove that oysters can grow great anywhere in our Inland Bays;
- **Improve water quality** through various restoration efforts;
- **Protect young spat**, giving them a chance to grow through better conditions;
- **Create habitat** for other marine species which are the base of the food chain for fish, crabs and other species;
- **Educate** volunteers and the general public about the ecology and value of a healthy population of Inland Bays oysters.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### Q – Don't we already have oysters in the Inland Bays?

A – Delaware's Inland Bays have a very small natural population of oysters. The Center believes that oysters were at one time, and hopefully will again be, a thriving and important component of Inland Bays' ecology. The goal of our Shellfish Restoration Program (which includes the Oyster Gardening efforts) is to restore a viable population of oysters to our local waterways, thereby creating critical benthic (bottom) habitat and increasing the filtering capacity of the bays' shellfish population.

### Q – Tell me about oysters, why are they so special?

A – Oysters are like the building blocks of the benthic community and create very important reef habitats for other organisms. Some of the many important species you will find around an oyster reef include: barnacles, mussels, bryozoans, worms, algae, plankton, as well as several kinds of fishes and crabs. Our oysters are not meant for harvest but for creating more reef habitat. Oysters are also filter feeders; they can remove tiny one-celled plants called phytoplankton and other small particles from the water and improve water quality.

### Q – You cage oysters?

## CIB Oyster Gardener Basics



### Sign Your Waiver

[2019 Oyster Gardener Waiver](#)

### Contact the Project Lead

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