



Recycled oyster shells

Don't Chuck Your Shucks

Project Status: Ongoing

Project Summary

Background

Natural oyster shell is the best material for settlement and growth of young oysters. Given the shortage of shells for use in restoring the Inland Bays' oyster population, the Center has formed partnerships with local businesses to divert oyster shells from landfills for use in shellfish enhancement projects.

Project Description

When you visit a participating restaurant and enjoy an oyster meal, the spent shells (shucks) from your plate will be separated from the waste stream and put into special bins. A Center employee picks up shells from the restaurants and transports them to a facility located near the Fresh Pond Tract of Delaware Seashore State Park. They are cured in the sun for six months to remove soft tissue and bacteria. The recycled shells are then used in local habitat restoration projects such as living shorelines, oyster reefs, and oyster gardening.

Objective

The DCYS Program teaches restaurant staff and patrons about the benefits of healthy oyster populations, as well as the Center's mission to improve the Bays. Restaurant staff have opportunities to volunteer in "bagging" events and preparing shells for use in restoration projects.

Project Timeline

The shells are collected year-round, more often during the warmer months of the year when visitors frequent our local participating restaurants. The Center hosts "bagging" events throughout the year as the material is needed to complete restoration projects. It's a great team-building event for organizations.



Volunteers bagging recycled oyster shells

Project Contact:

Nivette Pérez-Pérez,
Manager of Community Science
nperezperez@inlandbays.org

Jack Gazda,
Shellfish Program Specialist
dcys@inlandbays.org

Partner Restaurants (2025)

Above The Dunes
Bear Trap Dunes
Big Oyster Brewery
Bluecoast (Bethany)
Bluecoast (Rehoboth)
Catch 54
Chesapeake & Maine
Drift
Fins Ale House (Bethany)
Fins Ale House (Rehoboth)
Fins Ale House (Selbyville)
Fins Fish House
Fish On
Henlopen City Oyster House
Hooked Up
JR's Seafood Shack
Lewes Oyster House
Lobster Shanty
Matt's Fish Camp (Lewes)
Matt's Fish Camp (Bethany)
Matt's Fish Camp (Fenwick)
Starboard RAW
The Blue Crab
The Clubhouse at Baywood
Wheelhouse
Zoggs



Recycled shells are bagged and used for restoration projects.

What you can do

- Enjoy oysters in our local participating restaurants.
- Volunteer to help the Center bag shells, build reefs, or join our outreach programs.
- For more information and to find restaurants visit, inlandbays.org/dont-chuck-your-shucks.

Funding Partners

The program is funded by a combination of private donations and grants from the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. All fundraising activities are supported by private funds.



Outcomes/ Conclusions

As of 2025, more than 53,200 bushels of oyster shells have been collected by the DCYS program. That's over 1,600 tons of oyster shells diverted from landfills. These shells have been used to establish oyster reefs, supported restoration efforts like living shorelines, and have been shared with a fellow National Estuary Program, the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary to be used in science and restoration projects.

Project Highlights

In 2025 the Center collected roughly 7,800 bushels of oyster shells from participating Don't Chuck Your Shucks restaurants. This equates to 484,500 pounds of shells!



**DELAWARE
CENTER FOR THE
INLAND BAYS**

preserve • protect • restore

39375 Inlet Rd
Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971
(302) 226-8105

The Delaware Center for the Inland Bays is a non-profit organization established in 1994 to promote the wise use and enhancement of the Inland Bays and its watershed. With its many partners, the Center conducts public outreach and education, develops and implements restoration projects, encourages scientific inquiry and sponsors research. To learn how you can get on board with the bays go to inlandbays.org.