

Why save oyster shells?

Oysters are the foundation of healthy estuaries — where freshwater meets the sea. One of nature's best engineers, oysters filter up to 50 gallons of water a day. And the nooks and crannies of an oyster reef provide hiding places for small fish and crabs.

But Rhode Island's wild oyster population is just 5 percent of what it once was.

To help clean our coastal waters and improve habitat for fish, The Nature Conservancy collects oyster shells from restaurants like Matunuck Oyster Bar and puts them back in the water to build new reefs.



Want to support this project? Join us and become a Nature Conservancy member at nature.org/donateRI. Thank you!



Want to help?

TNC volunteers collect oyster shells from participating restaurants once a week and deliver them to our recycling center in West Kingston.

- Shells are stored in sealed, 5-gallon buckets, ready for pick-up.
- Volunteers bring the buckets to the recycling center, empty them, and return the buckets to the restaurant.
- We ask volunteers to keep track of how much shell has been collected.
- Volunteers must have their own transportation and be able to lift 30 pounds.

To get started, reach out to TNC's coastal restoration scientist, Will Helt, at (401) 214-4528 or william.helt@tnc.org.

Benefi-SHELL Recycling!



The Nature
Conservancy 

Constructing Oyster Reefs

More than 95% of oyster reefs have disappeared in Rhode Island, reducing habitat for bait fish and juvenile sport fish. TNC and RIDEM are recycling oyster shells to rebuild that lost habitat.



Oyster reefs provide refuge for recreational fish like tautog, flounder and black sea bass from predation.



The shells are deployed from barges, seeded with live oysters, and over time become colonized by invertebrates and fish.



More than 400 tons of oysters have been collected from local restaurants, festivals, and processors.

