**Digging Clams in Georgetown March 2023**

**With Your Warden, Jon Hentz**

For some people, it isn’t summer until you have spent time on the clam flats for a leisurely walk with the family and ventured into the world of clam digging.

Let’s dig clams in Sagadahoc Bay, or the flats of your choice. Call your shellfish warden, Jon Hentz (371-2732) to make an appointment for a clam harvesting experience at no cost to you. Pick a nice sunny day in the middle of summer with the family. A picnic lunch is a good idea, along with bug repellant, sun screen, and the proper clothing. However, it is inadvisable to wear sharp blue colors, as they attract the Green Head Fly. Feel free to wear your preferred foot protection or bare feet.

The correct clam hoe makes the digging experience more fun and much less labor intensive. Clam hoes will be provided on request. Please don’t purchase a hoe until you have talked with Jon. A clam hod (a basket used to hold clams) is nice but not required. Bring a pail, as you will need to collect salt water for your clams in order to purge them overnight in the refrigerator or cooler. This will give you a sand-free cooking and dining experience.

 A Shellfish License is required with one exception: if you choose to dig in Reid State Park on the sandy flats of Todd’s Point there is no license requirement. Please note, most all Reid State Park visitors must pay a park entry fee.

You will also receive a Department of Marine Resources map and letter showing the flats you will be harvesting on are open and free of any type of pollution, along with a guide to finding additional information for your future harvesting.

We will be following CDC and Maine Department of Public Health’s COVID-19 guidelines, along with standards set by the Georgetown Town Office.

And if you are interested, participants will learn about the basic life cycle of the clam, along with the importance of good water quality, which is vital to keep the clam flats open and safe for all to enjoy.

Laws, Rules, and Regulations for harvesting.

* Each person harvesting soft-shell, razor, or surf clams must first obtain a shellfish license from the town office during normal business hours. After hours license sales may be arranged by calling the Sagadahoc Bay Campground at 371-2014 up until 9:00 PM.
* Each licensed person may harvest up to one peck of soft-shell clams, one peck of razor clams and six pecks of surf clams per day.
* Exception to licensing. Each person harvesting Soft-Shell Clams within the confines of Reid State Park may harvest one peck of Soft-Shell clams per day without a license.
* All shellfish harvested are for the licensee’s family and guests and are not to be sold.

**Tolerance**

Any person may possess soft-shelled clams that are less than two inches in length provided they comprise less than 10% of any pile or container however; it is wisest never to take any short clams. Jon will give you a clam ring to keep, which is used to measure clams.

**One Peck Measure**

One peck equals ¼ bushel, or about 9½ quarts, or slightly less than ½ of a five gallon pail.

**Clam-flats in Georgetown may close from time to time for the following reasons:**

**1. *Pollution:*** by human or animal fecal coliform bacteria. Consumption of contaminated shellfish can cause abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever; and in extreme cases death may result. If symptoms occur, call 911 immediately for medical aid. If you are using a cell phone call 443-9711.

To monitor fecal coliform pollution, shellfish committee members regularly collect water samples from designated stations for testing. This is done at the request of the Maine Department of Marine Resources lab in West Boothbay Harbor. If these tests show continuing elevated levels of fecal coliform bacteria, the State will close the affected clam flats to protect the public health until the source of pollution is located, and corrections made. Heavy rains cause pollutants from the land to be washed into the waterways. Failing in-ground septic systems, faulty overboard discharge systems and malfunctioning sewage treatment plants along the Kennebec River can cause high fecal coliform counts on nearby clam-flats.

**2. *Red Tide:*** *or* Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP). The neurotoxin that causes PSP blocks nerve impulses, causing paralysis of the respiratory muscles and extremities. It is so poisonous that consumption of just one mussel could be fatal. Symptoms most often occur within 15 minutes of ingestion and include a tingling, numbness or burning sensation of the lips, gums, tongue and face; and death may result, If symptoms occur, call 911 immediately for medical aid. If you are using a cell phone call 443-9711.

To monitor Red Tide contamination, the State regularly samples mussels and clams along the coast, and tests them at the Boothbay lab. High levels cause the State to close flats.

**3*.* *Conservation Activities:*** *i.e*. reseeding of young clams to increase yields in sparse areas.

As part of managing our clam resource, the Georgetown Shellfish Committee carries on a program of “re-seeding” depleted flats with very young clams taken from areas on the flats where they have set in thickly. The town then closes the re-seeded “conservation” area for several years to allow clams to grow to the 2-inch minimum harvestable size.

**4. *General information:*** Most shellfish commonly eaten in Georgetown are bivalves having two shells, hinged together. They include oysters, clams, mussels, and scallops. Single-shelled mollusks such as snails and welks are also eaten, but less frequently. Mussels and clams have an extremely efficient method of filtration and will concentrate microorganisms at much higher levels in their tissue than are found in their habitat. The level of harmful bacteria in a mollusk can be from slightly elevated to twenty-two times that found in the water from which it was taken.

**5.** ***Closed areas***: During closures, the Shellfish Warden will make a dedicated effort to post signs at the major points of access to some of the flats. However, never trust the absence of a sign; they can be weather damaged or vandalized. To be safe, please visit the Department of Marine Resources web site at “Maine DMR” go to Recreational Fishing, Fisheries, Shellfish and then Closures and there you will find a wealth of information, or call the Town Office at 371-2820, check the bulletin board outside the town office for the latest notices, or call Jon Hentz, Shellfish Warden at 371-2732 for assistance. The Red Tide Hot Line telephone number is 1-800-232-4733.

 Jon L. Hentz

 Georgetown Shellfish Conservation Warden