

East Hampton Shellfish Education and Enhancement Directive (EHSEED)

Oyster Gardening Program

2024

Background:

Since the 1980's, East Coast waters have experienced devastating shellfish losses due to overfishing and damaging algae blooms.



In 2015 a corps of eco-conscious South Fork residents collaborated to expand shellfish education and enhancement programs in East Hampton (EH) town waters by forming an oyster-growing community cooperative, or oyster gardening program. By linking with the successful EH Town Shellfish Hatchery, the EHSEED program created opportunities for local citizens to learn about and help the threatened ecosystem that is part of the vital Peconic Estuary system, resulting in educated and dedicated stewards of the environment.

The Town of East Hampton opened the Shellfish Hatchery in the 1980's in order to replenish shellfish stocks. In 2006, the EH Shellfish Hatchery began conducting a series of shellfish culture workshops to meet interest and demand for shellfish education. Participants of the workshops, including visitors as well as students and members of local community organizations, toured the facility as part of a hands-on five-part educational program. We believed that an oyster gardening program was the next step in the evolution of public shellfish education and enhancement.

Similar programs have been offered in other areas of eastern Long Island. On the North Fork, Suffolk Projects in Aquaculture Training (SPAT), part of Cornell Cooperative Extension, has operated successfully since 2002 and now has over 100 members. The Shinnecock Restoration Project (ShiRP) in Southampton Town is partnering with Stony Brook University's School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences (SoMAS) to reseed the bay as part of their ongoing water quality research. In May, 2015 a Save the Bay shellfish restoration project launched in Moriches Bay when 50,000 oysters were seeded.

We believed these types of efforts, as well as the education that accompanies it; needed to expand as the quality of our waters is an ongoing concern.

An Ongoing Community Effort:

The start-up and growth phases of the oyster gardening program are financed by a combination of individual & family memberships and South Fork Sea Farmers' fund-raising. The EH Town Shellfish Hatchery staff implements the educational program, provides training and maintains the oyster gardens. Lectures and workshop offerings take place at the Shellfish Hatchery's facilities in Montauk & Springs, and Town Hall in East Hampton. The South Fork Natural History Museum (SOFO) also provides a meeting venue and enhances awareness and membership in the program by disseminating information to its membership. South Fork Sea Farmers helps facilitate further education programs via their social media platforms, website & LTV television series, and handles fund-raising. Their fund-raising goes toward oyster gardening equipment, oyster reef restoration projects and local student scholarships.

Grounded in Success:

The EHSEED program is anchored by the scientific and educational expertise of the EH Town Shellfish Hatchery which:

- Spawns, rears and disseminates upwards of 15 million shellfish annually to EH waters
- Monitors catches/recruitment to determine effectiveness of seeding
- Improves seed, larval and juvenile shellfish survival in the wild through grants and other funding sources
- Improves culture techniques in the hatchery
- Collaborates with educational institutions, including Cornell Cooperative Extension and Stony Brook Universities
- Has been formally educating the public since 2006

Benefits of the Program Include:

- Better water quality; an adult oyster filters upwards of 50 gallons of water a day
- Increased public awareness regarding the benefits of shellfish in the ecosystem
- Healthy local food source
- Improved marine habitat benefitting other animal and plant species
- Involvement of the public as active participants and protectors

- Reinvigorated eco-volunteer base
- Building partnerships with schools to encourage students as environmental stewards of the future

Membership Fees:

- Each new member/family gardener will pay a membership fee of \$250, while returning gardeners pay \$200 whether taking new seed or not. This fee entitles gardeners to training, oyster seed to maintain a crop of 1,000 and the gear and assistance required to grow them to harvest size (usually end of second season). The Town will acquire the proper permits for gardeners.
- Own-growers, or those that will grow off of their own dock, bulkhead or underwater land will pay an initial fee of \$350 (this assumes the grower will keep the gear) and annual fees thereafter of \$150/year. Own-growers must obtain a License to Collect or Possess (LCP) from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation and an aquaculture permit from the EH Trustees (all waters except Lake Montauk) before receiving gear and oysters.

The 2024 Program:

- The annual program will begin with a hybrid in-person/Zoom meeting on **February 29** at 5pm with a session on Shellfish Biology, Broodstock Conditioning and Algae Culture at East Hampton's Town Hall. The next lecture, **March 28**, same format, will cover Spawning and Hatchery Culture Systems. Next, on **April 25** we'll have another in-person/Zoom discussion to talk about shellfish diseases, pests, predators and handling. On **May 4 & 5**, growers from the previous year will meet at their garden sites to recover their overwintered oysters. From here oysters and gear will be maintained on a thrice-weekly basis (see schedule). **June 15 & 16** are big days, gardeners will get their new oyster seed (up to 1,000 each) and begin the growing process! We'll meet at garden sites per the schedule, hand out oyster seed and deploy them into growing gear. Oysters and gear will be maintained on a thrice-weekly schedule thereafter. Finally, at the end of the growing season (**after your last maintenance session weekend of October 19, 20**) oysters will be over-wintered for continued growth the following year.
- Current oyster garden sites are located at 42 Gann Rd., East Hampton (Three Mile Harbor), 142 Waterhole Rd., East Hampton (Hog Creek), 286 Gerard Dr., East Hampton (Accabonac), the end of Crassen Blvd, Amagansett (Napeague) and in Lake Montauk at 159 East Lake Dr.

The fine print: Oyster Gardeners must be residents of East Hampton Town but anyone may attend lectures/presentations free of charge.

Thanks to our sponsors!



Contact:

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Please visit southforkseafarmers.org for more information, related educational videos and sign up for the email list to receive further relevant information regarding oyster gardening and sea farming.