

Oyster Insights from Sal Sunseri



Above: Sal Sunseri, Owner of P&J Oysters



APHRODISIACS? No, you will not get turned on by eating an oyster. However, this bivalve is full of zinc, which makes you feel good and keeps up your energy. Not only does the zinc boost your sex drive, but it also ups your immune system, helps get rid of acne, eases rashes and makes your bones stronger.

ARE OYSTERS MALE OR FEMALE? It is hard to determine the gender of an oyster because unless they are spawning, the sex organs are not visible. All oysters start off life as a male, but they are hermaphroditic and after one year can change to females. Within 3 years, 90% of oysters are female, so you can usually tell the gender of an oyster by the size: small ones are males, and large ones are females. An oyster cannot be male and female at the same time.

HOW DO PEARLS END UP INSIDE OF OYSTERS? An oyster produces a pearl when foreign material becomes trapped inside the shell. The oyster responds to the irritation by producing nacre, a combination of calcium and protein. The nacre coats the foreign material and over time produces a pearl.

ARE OYSTERS LIVE ANIMALS? Yes, and they require the right balance of temperature, air, and moisture to remain alive and edible. If not properly stored the oyster will weaken, its shell will open or gape, the meat will dry out, contaminants could enter, or it could die. NEVER eat a dead or gaping oyster.

OYSTERS CLEAN THE WATER. Each oyster filters about 30 to 50 gallons of water a day, which makes these not only tasty creatures, but good-for-the-environment ones as well.

OYSTER SHELLS ARE GREAT FOR GARDENING. After your night of oyster-binging, save the shells and crush them up for your garden. The shells help neutralize the acidity in the soil, as well as help with drainage and an even release of calcium through the growing season.



How to Handle Oysters:

STORAGE: When handled and stored properly, oysters can survive for months after harvest. We recommend that they be eaten within two weeks for best flavor

"DO": Store oysters at 33-40 degrees damp cold. In the back of the refrigerator covered with damp paper towels is fine, or on ice in a closed cooler allowing for drainage of melt-water.

"DO NOT": Store oysters in a sealed plastic bag or other airtight container. Store oysters where they could freeze, or where temperatures will fluctuate widely or reach over 40 F.

How To Shuck An Oyster:

Be sure to use a double-folded kitchen towel or an old oven glove to protect the hand that is holding the oyster while you're using the knife to open the shell. Special gloves and knives are available on many websites. Clean the shells by scrubbing them

with a stiff wire brush under running water.

To open the oyster, insert the knife point into the "hinge" at the back of the shell until a small gap is felt. Then poke around to find the muscle that keeps the shell shut. Twist the blade firmly. Once the muscle is loosened, pry open the two shells by running the knife blade between their edges and gently twisting the blade as it's worked around the seam. Cut the attachment and discard the top shell. Cut the muscle fiber under the oyster that holds it to the shell so the oyster may be picked up with a cocktail fork.

As oysters are removed from their shells, place them in a bowl. If the oyster juices will be used in a sauce or other preparation, rid them of any stray bits of grit by straining them through a fine sieve into another bowl or saucepan. The oysters and juices should be refrigerated immediately and removed just before they're to be eaten or cooked.

Of course, seafood markets sell oysters already shucked, by the pint, quart, or gallon.