



Island County Recreational Shellfish Harvesting FAQs

- **How do I check a beach status or see if there is a beach closure?**
 - Always check the Washington State Department of Health's (DOH) [Shellfish Safety Map](#) immediately before and after you harvest. You can zoom in to your location and see if it's safe and open. We post warning signs when a beach is closed, but these can be stolen or vandalized. It is best to check the DOH's map before and after harvesting.
- **What are Shellfish Treaty Rights?**
 - Learn all about tribal shellfish harvest on the [Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission Shellfish Treaty Rights FAQ](#) page.
- **Can I harvest shellfish at Penn Cove?**
 - **East Side:** East of San de Fuca boat ramp (on both the north and south sides, including the Coupeville side) is permanently closed because the beaches are within the closure area for sewage treatment plant outfall.
 - **West Side** (visit this area's [WDFW page](#) for more information):
 - West of the San de Fuca boat ramp, West Penn Cove's shellfish harvesting season is July 15th through September 30th. During this time, the beaches are conditionally open; it is an area approved for shellfish harvesting as long as the nearby sewage treatment plan is functioning properly and there are no other water quality issues.
 - Twin Lagoons is open year-round (as long as there are no water quality issues). From Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW): "There is no direct upland access to Twin Lagoons. Harvesters may walk from the parking area on Madrona Way. The boundary between West Penn Cove and Twin Lagoons is the dock that extends across the beach from the Captain Whidbey Inn." Please respect private property and do not cross private uplands to get to the beach. Please use the Madrona Way or HWY 20 parking areas.
- **Is it safe to harvest shellfish on private land?**
 - Harvesting on private land is at the harvester's own risk.
- **Can I eat raw shellfish that was harvested recreationally?**
 - No! Please do not. Visit the DOH's page on [shellfish handling, storing, and cooking](#) to learn how to safely prepare and eat shellfish.
- **Why do some beaches close for some or all species of shellfish during the open season?**
 - Beaches close because the DOH or public health staff have determined that there is a risk of a shellfish-related illness in that area. There could be a lot of leaky septic tanks nearby, or the DOH might have found biotoxins in shellfish samples (even if a red tide is not visible). Shellfish are filter feeders and can accumulate material that harms humans but does not hurt the shellfish.

- Butter and Varnish clams hold onto biotoxins longer than other shellfish, so an area might be closed to only these species. Learn about shellfish identification [here](#).
- Shellfish-related illnesses can be serious, painful, and deadly. Always check the [Shellfish Safety Map](#) before and after harvesting.
- **What about crabbing?**
 - Read all about crabbing regulations [here](#).
- **Can I get regular updates about shellfish beach statuses?**
 - Yes! Sign up for Island County's [Recreational Shellfish Harvesting listserv](#). You will get emails with beach status updates (this is not a substitute for checking the [Shellfish Safety Map](#)).
- **How do I know when the tide is suitable for harvest?**
 - Island County tides can vary greatly from place to place, so always check the tide station closest to where you plan to harvest. Visit the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Tides and Currents](#) page for more information.