

How to Grow Your Oyster Garden

Welcome to a new oyster gardening season. New volunteers, we are happy to have you join us; seasoned volunteers, it is great to have you back. This fact sheet will tell you everything you need to know to get started with your oyster garden.

You have completed the first step, which is to come to one of the pickup points and collect your oyster spat. These are juvenile oysters that have settled and attached to large adult oysters. Each bag contains 100 large adult oyster shells. If you look closely, you can see numerous spat attached to each shell. Each spat is about half the size of your thumbnail with very thin shells.

Your oysters have been out of the water for a while now, but they have remained covered and moist. When you take them, you will want to get them back into the water without delay. You should divide the shells up evenly among your Page Cages, and lower them into the water. Most Gardeners have four cages, so there should be 25 whole oyster shells per cage.

When lowering your cages into the water, make sure the cages are not resting on the bottom or bumping into pilings (figure 1). This will help protect them from predators.

After a week, you will want to begin routine care of your oysters:

1. Raise each cage.
2. Gently rinse any mud, algae, or barnacles from the cage.
3. If you see any blue crabs, stone crabs, or drills in the cage, remove them.
4. Shake the oysters gently to prevent them from growing through the mesh.
5. Return them to their suspended position in the water column.
6. Repeat weekly.

The more consistent you are with the maintenance of your oyster garden, the easier it will be to care for your garden and the better your oysters will grow. You will see small mud crabs, shrimp, and maybe a few fish in your cages after a short period of time. These are examples of the more than 300 species that are supported by natural oyster reefs.

If you have questions, contact us at (251) 438-5690.

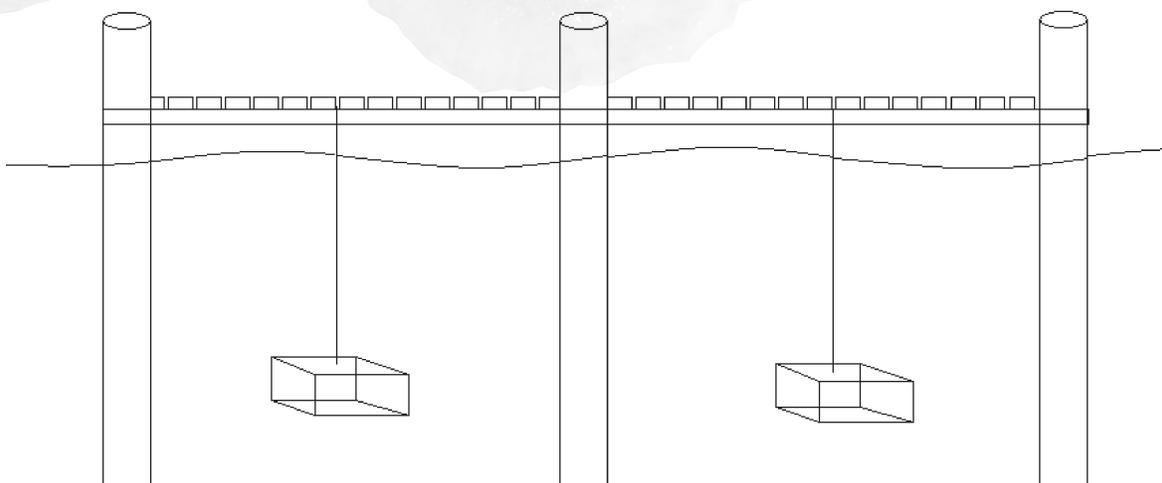


Figure 1. Page Cages suspended between pilings, and off the bottom



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P. Waters Jr., *Extension Specialist*, Aquaculture and Recreational Pond Management

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For more information, call your county Extension office. Look in your telephone directory under your county's name to find the number.

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