



Oregon Sea Grant Extension  
Sustainable Tourism &  
Outdoor Recreation Program

# Interpretative Fact Sheet Butter Clam (*Saxidomus giganteus*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

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**Tourism and Business Development College of Business,  
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# Butter Clams (*Saxidomus giganteus*)

 [tourism.oregonstate.edu/butter-clams-saxidomus-giganteus/](https://tourism.oregonstate.edu/butter-clams-saxidomus-giganteus/)

By colliiek2

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| *“I’ll take a bucket of steamed clams with garlic butter and plenty of napkins...”*

## How can one live in the Pacific Northwest and not know the taste of fresh steamed clams dripping of parsley and garlic butter?

Butter clams can be found throughout Oregon’s nearshore areas and larger estuaries. They are also found at many fine dining locations.



## Where are they?

Butter clams are most often found living 6-12 inches down in the substrate of large estuarine systems, such as Coos, Tillamook, and Yaquina and in bays like Yaquina and Netarts where there is higher salinity. The mud and sandy substrates in these areas are some of the easier places to dig.

They are excellent burrowers and abundant in shell, sandstone, and even rocky areas. Like other types of clams, Butter clams create a distinctive rectangular ‘show’ or mark in the sand that exposes their general location. The Butter clam mark looks like an indent created by a flathead screwdriver.

The clam is usually not directly below the mark but relatively close vertically and will burrow away from you (in other words, sneak up on them and dig fast if you want to get them!). Butter clams will dig 50 feet below the low-tide line.

## What did you find?

When digging, more than one type of clam may be found. Depending on the type of clam, you must keep anything that you dig up regardless of size or condition. Meaning? You might dig up more than just a Butter Clam. It may be possible to return unbroken clams to

the immediate dig site if unbroken (see ODFW regulations).



Butter clams can reach up to 4-inches wide.

## Details to know

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Be sure to check the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) regulations for licensing, limits and catch requirements, catch activity reports, techniques, tools, and seminars (<https://myodfw.com/crabbing-clamming/licensing-info>). A license for Oregon resident in 2020 is a bargain at only \$10.00 per year! Butter clams are called a variety of names including Washingtons, Martha Washingtons, Beefsteak, and Quahog.

The ODFW website (above) includes information on seasonal opportunities, identifying the various species, safety, and provides local maps for where to look. Butter clam harvest is possible on the North Spit, Strawberry Island, Clam Island, Pigeon Point, Empire, Barview, and the Charleston Triangle and Flats. The site also lists locations accessible only by boat.

**One more note**—be sure to back fill any holes you create and have fun!