Oregon Sea Grant Extension
Sustainable Tourism &
Outdoor Recreation Program

Interpretative Fact Sheet

Pacific Razor Clam

(*Siliqua patula*)

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,
Oregon State University Extension - Oregon Sea Grant at
http://tourism.oregonstate.edu/

Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional Program
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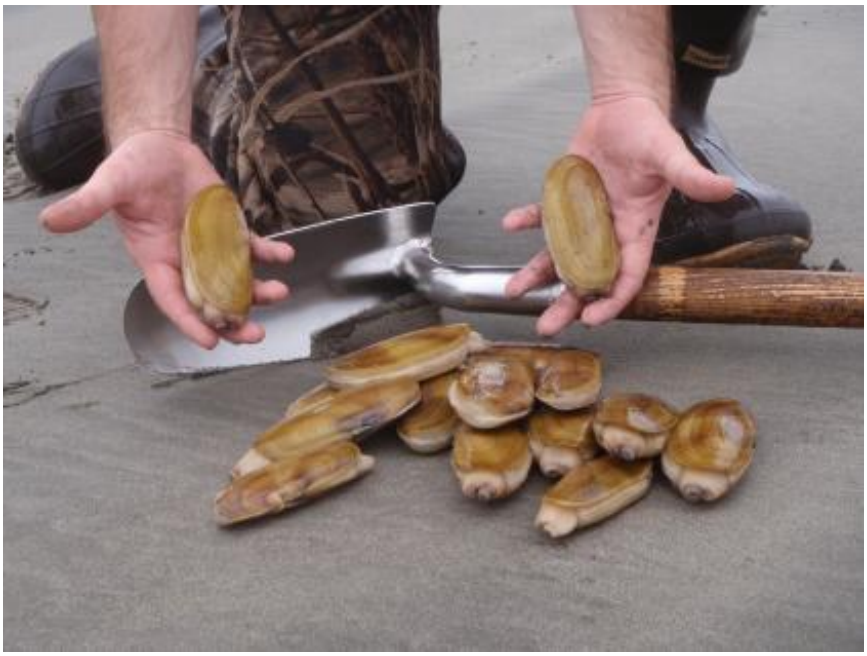
https://www.gorpguide.org/become-a-gorp-certified-guide

Razor clams (Siliqua patula)

tourism.oregonstate.edu/razor-clams-siliqua-patula/

By colliek2 September 9, 2020

What's not to like about a recreational pastime with delicious rewards?
Hunting razor clams is a challenging but fun coastal activity that can be done in many areas along the Oregon coastline.



Courtesy Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife

Habitat

Razor clams live in stale, sandy, surf swept beaches. Some are found in coastal bays. An 18-mile stretch of Clatsop beaches have a very dense population (the most for any other area in the state), and account for 95 percent of Oregon's razor clam harvest. Other areas can include Cannot Beach, Tillamook, three beaches around Newport, Winchester Bay, Coos Bay, Bandon, and Gold Beach.

The bigger clams (about 4-6-inches long) may not be near the surface. Juveniles are usually found in the first few inches of the sand and as they grow will dig deeper into the sand.

As the water warms in the spring and summer and food (plankton) supplies increase, growth is accelerated. Clams that are 3-1/2 inches and larger may be harvested. Adult clams spend part of their time deep in the sand away from diggers, birds, crabs, and fish.

What to look for

Razor clams have a long, narrow, thin shell with a smooth brown coating. This shell is rather delicate and can be damaged during harvest. Many diggers want only big clams and discard or rebury smaller ones. Fully 80 percent of the discarded clams die because they are broken, have their necks cut off, or are improperly reburied.

Razor clam. Photo courtesy ODFW.

More than one species may be present in the digging site and can also be broken during the digging process. Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) has documented incidents of wasting small clams where 30-40 percent of dug clam holes contained broken or small clams. ODFW regulations call for clam diggers to keep the first 15 razor clams they dig, regardless of size or condition.

Wastage occurs when diggers return small or damaged clams back to the sand. Small clams are vulnerable to handling, pressure caused from digging, and washing out from wave action. The law requires that diggers keep the first 15 clams dug regardless of size or condition. If everyone followed the rules, less clams would be wasted and more would be available for the frying pan.

What is your strategy?

Get there early. The best clamming is during low or minus tides (minus tides are the best). Clams will be nearer to the surface when ocean swells are low and more beach will be exposed for digging.

Use the right tools. There are several potential tools including a clam gun which sucks the clam from the sand, special narrow clam shovels for manual digging, and even a few dogs who love to dig. Whatever tools and techniques that are used the secret to your success is **SPEED**.

First shovel.
Courtesy ODFW

Understand the prey. Razor clams can dig up to a foot in a minute and have been recorded at depths more than four feet. Digging up four feet of sand quickly can be challenging. Our advantage? The clams can only move vertically through the sand. They are incapable of horizontal movements.

Learn how to find them. Razor clams will extend their neck near the surface and create a distinct imprint in the sand called a "show." Shows are found most commonly by one of two methods: Looking for small round dimples in dry sand or pounding a shovel handle in receding surf.

A clam hole show.
Photo courtesy ODFW.

Learn how to net them. Dig like crazy, try not to break or damage other species, and be careful when reaching into the hole to retrieve the clam… they have earned the 'razor' name for a reason. You are required to keep the first 15 clams you dig, large, small, broken, or whole.

When open?

First there are seasonal closures on some beaches to protect juvenile clams. There are also closures due to a build-up of Domoic acid which is a powerful biological toxin created by some species of phytoplankton. This toxin does not make the clams sick, but can make humans sick.

Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) in cooperation with ODFW and other agencies collects and tests razor clams during most low tide series. Check for shellfish safety closures or call the toll free ODA shellfish hotline 1-800-448-2474), and get open season information for the beach you plan to visit from Up to date information on seasons.

ODFW has a great online tutorial and references on razor clams. Do a little research before you go to increase your odds for a successful hunt. Recommended ODFW references include: https://myodfw.com/crabbing-clamming/species/clams,

https://myodfw.com/articles/how-razor-clam, https://myodfw.com/articles/shellfish-and-biotoxins, and https://www.dfw.state.or.us/MRP/shellfish/razorclams/lifehistory.asp.