

**MASTER OYSTER GARDENERS
AN ADVANCED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM IN OYSTER AQUACULTURE**

**PRESENTED BY VIRGINIA INSTITUTE OF MARINE SCIENCE/SCHOOL OF
MARINE SCIENCE, COLLEGE OF WILLIAM AND MARY AND TIDEWATER
OYSTER GARDENERS ASSOCIATION**

Over the past several years oyster aquaculture for the homeowner, or oyster gardening, has gained tremendous popularity, both because of interest in restoring the Virginia oyster population and interest in helping to clean the waters of the Chesapeake Bay. Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) was formed in 1997 to promote oyster gardening and serve as an educational resource for oyster gardeners.

It quickly became apparent to us that “experts” were needed to help oyster gardeners evaluate conditions at their growing location, assist in identifying predators, help locate needed materials and supplies.

In 1998 TOGA received a grant from the Chesapeake Bay Restoration Fund to fund the development of a Master Oyster Gardeners (MOG) Program. This program is designed to provide an intensive academic and practical course in oyster aquaculture, which will allow the trainee to serve as a resource for oyster gardeners in his community. The first class was held in 1998 and graduated nineteen enthusiastic Master Oyster Gardeners. Further Courses were held in 1999, 2000 and 2002.

Our fifth MOG class will be held June 28 – 30, 2004, with an optional half-day the morning of July 1. Classroom and laboratory sessions will run all day Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Students will meet at 7:30 every morning, and should not expect to finish before 4:30 to 5:00 pm each day. Tuesday we will work in the hatchery and students should come dressed in work clothes. Students who come from distant areas are encouraged to make arrangements to stay nearby from Sunday night to Thursday morning, and we will assist you in finding lodging. The optional field trip on Thursday will be a trip to Sarah’s Creek Shellfish in Gloucester Point. Some of the topics to be covered in the class work are: history of the oyster fishery in Virginia, worldwide oyster aquaculture, basic oyster biology, oyster reefs, shellfish diseases, breeding programs, hatchery operation and seed production, growing sites and structures, recognition of predators, and governmental regulations. Virginia Institute of Marine Science faculty and staff, Virginia Marine Resources Commission personnel and representatives of the Virginia Health Department will teach classes.

Following completion of this course, there will be public announcements of names, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses and communities of all graduates.

Admission to this program is limited to twenty people, and a strict selection process will be used. In order to qualify, oyster gardeners:

- must agree to attend all training classes of the course, some of which will involve physical labor in the hatchery and float building classes
- should have been growing oysters for a minimum of one year
- must be willing to commit themselves to helping other oyster gardeners for not less than one year following the course. This may involve many telephone calls and may require visiting growing sites to help the gardener solve his problems
- must be willing for their name and telephone number to be available to the public

- must be willing to make public presentations on oyster gardening to local community organizations, or assist in presenting workshops or other TOGA events; they may be asked to participate in TOGA sponsored research projects
- must have a VMRC permit for their oyster floats.

A fee of \$130.00 for TOGA members or \$140 for non-TOGA members will be payable upon acceptance to the course. Course material, including a Master Oyster Gardener handbook, breakfasts, break refreshments, lunches, a wine and cheese reception, dinner on Tuesday night and an oyster roast on Wednesday night are covered by this fee. Lodging is not covered. Options for lodging include Geddings House on the VIMS campus at \$15 per night, or the Duke of York Motel.

If you are interested in being considered for participation in this program, please complete and sign the enclosed Application Form and mail to Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association at the address below. Please include any other personal information, which might be helpful to the committee in choosing participants. An effort will be made to choose applicants from as broad a geographical area as possible. Private oyster gardeners will be given preference over gardeners with a commercial interest.

For questions or additional information, please contact Jackie Partin at 804 694-4407, or Ray Hook at 757 898-6026.

Applications must be received no later than May 20, 2004, and should be mailed to:

TOGA
8218 Hell Neck Road
Gloucester, VA 23061