

Growing oysters for a cleaner Bay

www.oystergardener.org

Fall 2026

Upcoming: Fall '26 Oyster Float and Spat Sale: October 17, 2026

~ Vic Spain, Jim Dall, MOGs

TOGA's annual fall oyster float and spat sale and educational event will be held on Saturday, October 17 at Camp Kekoka, 1083 Boys Camp Rd, Kilmarnock, VA 22482, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon. Pre-orders must be placed by October 1, 2026. ([Float Sale order form](#), p. 18). Walk-ups are welcome to purchase any extra devices we have on hand, and may join TOGA onsite to purchase floats and supplies. Vendors will bring additional devices.

TOGA will provide educational materials and personal consultation with Master Oyster Gardeners (MOGs) who will work with both prospective and experienced oyster gardeners. If you are not experienced, you may attend [OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening](#) on site from 10:30 a.m. - 12 noon; ([OYS-101 details](#), page 9).

The sale includes Classic Taylor Floats, Taylor2 Floats, Flip Floats, Tidal Tumblers, Rough Riders, Bottom Cages, Boxed Bags, and Spat Tubes, which should be pre-ordered. Also, Diploid & Triploid spat, spat bags, hats, shirts, aprons, and other TOGA logo items are for sale without pre-ordering. Descriptions of TOGA-built floats and devices, are on TOGA's website:

www.oystergardener.org/devices-and-designs/

A *Chum Bag* is offered free with the purchase of spat tubes or spat bags, to be used until spat grow large enough to go inside a float or cage without falling out.



Inside this Newsletter...

- [Homeschoolers Learn About Oysters](#), p. 12
- [Oyster Floats Order form](#), p. 18
- [Float Building Days at Camp Kekoka](#), p. 13
- [Wonderful World of Oysters at Camp Kinsale](#), p. 6
- [Marine Science Day at VIMS](#), p. 5
- [High School Writing Competition](#), p. 16
- [Scouting for Oysters](#), p. 8
- [York County Schools Growing Oysters](#), p. 2
- [Awesome Oysters](#), by Brenda Silvia, pp. 10-11
- [Oyster Festival Queen and "Little Miss Spat"](#), p. 4
- [Algae Blooms in the Bay](#), p. 15
- [Upcoming TOGA Events 2026](#), p. 17
- [TOGA Membership form](#), p. 19
- [The Newsletter and "Letters to the Editor,"](#) p. 12
- [TOGA Board of Directors](#), p. 7
- [Master Naturalists Meet on Oysters & the Bay](#), p. 14

Join us for Build-Your-Own Float Day: Saturday, October 10, 2026, Camp Kekoka, 10am to 1pm:

TOGA members who help build their own floats before the sale, in return will get a \$25 discount on items they build. Sign up on either the online or mail-in order forms. Contact Vic Spain for details: vicspain@rocketmail.com

The newly upgraded Taylor2 Float contains a total of six 4-liter molded high-density polyethylene floats attached to a 1-inch wire mesh cage, making this a durable waterproof oyster-containment device.



The two yearly oyster float & cage sales are TOGA's primary fundraising activities as a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. All proceeds beyond material costs are donated to the [TOGA/Virginia Institute of Marine Science \(VIMS\) Student Fellowship Endowment](#), and to other projects that foster oyster gardening and restoring the health of the Bay. (*continued: Fall '26 Oyster Float Sale, p. 3*)



Are your Dues due for 2026?



www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member

TOGA annual membership dues are \$25 per family for one calendar year -- January through December (not 12 months from the date of your payment).

If you received this newsletter in the mail, please check the year next to your name on the address label. If it's 2026, or earlier, then renew your membership status online so it's current. Questions? Contact Vic Spain at vicspain@rocketmail.com

TOGA members get these benefits:

- Receive by mail printed newsletters with the latest oyster gardening information
- Participate in educational events sponsored by TOGA.
- Learn about innovations in oyster gardening techniques
- Learn from the expertise of hundreds of others interested in growing oysters
- Enroll free of charge for the class *OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening*
- Purchase equipment at TOGA float sales
- Get free admission to the Member Appreciation Party and Oyster Potluck Dinner for your household
- Meet great friends

- Help improve the health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries

To become a TOGA member, visit our website:

[Membership form](#) to update your membership information or renew. A mail-in version of the membership form is available: [see page 14](#). Make sure your mailing address and email address are correct. It is how we contact you.



Above, left to right: York County Life Science Teachers, Regan Gavagni and Jordan Woodman; Science Coordinator Veronica Warwick, MOG Vic Spain. Photo by Betsy McAllister, Hampton City Schools Stem Coordinator.

York County Schools Growing Oysters ~ Vic Spain, MOG

York County Middle Schools are excited to partner with the Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association to raise oysters in a Tidal Tumbler at Back Creek Park, providing students with a hands-on opportunity to support local environmental stewardship and Chesapeake Bay restoration. Thanks to Darryl and Joyce Krolicki (Oyster Gardening LLC) for donating 500 large spat.

The *Float & Spat* sale includes classic Taylor Floats, Taylor2 Floats, Flip Floats, Tidal Tumblers, Rough Riders, Bottom Cages, Boxed Bags, and Spat Tubes, which should be pre-ordered ([see Order Form](#), p. 18). Shown below are a selection of TOGA-built floats and cages available for sale on October 17th. Several vendors will be on hand to sell Diploid and Triploid spat, along with a selection of their oyster floats (no pre-ordering needed).



These Spat Tubes fit inside a Tidal Tumbler or Rough Rider; small or medium mesh is available. Start with 1000 spat and move to larger containers as they grow.



(above) Mini Tidal Tumbler, with a lightweight 4-liter molded high-density polyethylene float, 1-inch wire mesh. To contain spat, use the Minnow Trap Spat Tube.



New: Boxed Oyster Cage, with 9mm Chum Bag atop.



Full-size Tidal Tumbler, with a lightweight 4-liter molded high-density polyethylene float, 1-inch wire mesh. To contain spat, use the Minnow Trap Spat cage, or the small or medium size Spat Tube, shown to the right.



This spat tube is a modified minnow trap with the ends covered, keeping spat inside and predators out. It can be used independently, suspended with crab-pot line, or placed inside a Tidal Tumbler or Rough Rider; two spat tubes will fit inside. (500 spat per tube)



**Oyster Festival Queen Candidate
Mentors her “Little Miss Spat” Partner
at Camp Kekoka Summer Camp**
*~ Petunia Laster, Oyster Festival Queen
Candidate*

For the past six weeks, my Oyster Festival project has given me the chance to work alongside the Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) every Wednesday from June through July for three hours at Camp Kekoka in Kilmarnock, Virginia. Joining me whenever she could was my Urbanna Oyster Festival “spat,” Paisley Duke, volunteering alongside with dedicated members of TOGA to help educate children from all over the state of Virginia about one of America’s greatest natural resources, the Chesapeake Bay.

TOGA is a volunteer organization committed to restoring and protecting the Chesapeake Bay through oyster gardening, education, and environmental oversight. Their members devote countless hours to growing oysters, improving water quality, and teaching others about the important role oysters play in keeping our waterways healthy. Their passion for conservation is inspiring, and it has been an honor to learn from and work beside them.

Together with Master Oyster Gardeners Captain Doug Schafer and Richard Siciliano, Paisley and I helped teach more than 400 children about the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem. Throughout the program, students learned about oysters, blue crabs, fish, and the many forms of wildlife that depend on a healthy Bay. We also explained how oysters naturally filter the water, creating cleaner habitats that benefit countless species while supporting Virginia's seafood industry.

One of the most rewarding parts of this experience was seeing the excitement on the children's faces as they asked questions, wrote “notes” on recycled oyster shells to the future spat, and discovered how every living thing in the Chesapeake Bay is connected. Helping children who live all around Virginia, especially the ones who live in the city; understand the importance of protecting our environment is one of the best ways to ensure that future generations will continue to care for these

valuable natural resources.

Working with TOGA has taught me that conservation is truly a community effort. Every volunteer, educator, and student plays a role in protecting the Chesapeake Bay. Whether it's growing oysters, reducing pollution, or simply learning more about the environment, every action can make a difference.

I am incredibly grateful to Captain Doug Schaefer, Dr. Richard Siciliano, the members of TOGA, and Camp Kekoka for welcoming Paisley and me each week. Their knowledge, dedication, and enthusiasm made this experience one I will never forget. I am proud and honored that my Oyster Festival project allowed me to partner with such an outstanding organization while helping inspire over 400 children to appreciate, protect, and preserve the Chesapeake Bay for generations after us.



(L-R): Doug Schaefer, Petunia Laster (Oyster Queen candidate), Paisley Duke (“Little Miss Spat”), and Richard Siciliano

Great Results at VIMS Marine Science Day, Gloucester Point

~Carl Zulick, MOG

Thanks to Master Oyster Gardener (MOG) candidates and awesome volunteers Greg Jesseman, Ed Walker, and Gene Kendall, we had a great day at VIMS Marine Science Day on May 30, 2026. This was the first Science Day I have worked as a volunteer, and TOGA will participate in it every year. We had the best mix of youngsters, high school and college students, parents, and retirees. We picked up three to six new members and spoke to several former TOGA members who stopped growing oysters and are no longer members. Some may renew and restart growing.

As expected, youngsters loved the live tanks, and they drew their parents in. We had a Marine science coloring page table, along with oyster shells that children wrote on or colored. Several visitors wanted to grow oysters but needed information on how to start an oyster garden. We connected with key staff at VIMS throughout the day and hopefully are strengthening those relationships.



"Look, Daddy! A fish in the water!"



I have to say, our TOGA volunteers were awesome. They made the day easy for me. They answered questions, demonstrated floats, and encouraged membership in TOGA. The new MOGS are a big part of TOGA's future, and we desperately need them.



One happy child with every oyster's nemesis, Callinectes sapidus, the Chesapeake blue crab.

Exploring the Wonderful World of Oysters, Camp Kinsale

~ Sue Borra, MOG

Camp Kinsale is a unique weeklong camp held at the Slips Marina on the Yeocomico River in Kinsale, VA. The Camp gives children, age 6 -12, a chance to experience all things about living on the Chesapeake Bay. Each day the campers explore different activities, like oystering, crabbing, fishing, boating, sailing, kayaking, and more.

TOGA leads the sessions of Oyster Day activities with a lesson about oysters, exploring an oyster garden cage with growing oysters, making a Rough Rider oyster float, eating fried oysters, and more. Campers also conduct an oyster tank experiment to see how oysters clean the water. After TOGA's Oyster Day, held at three camp sessions, the campers leave with a new appreciation for oysters as an important keystone species for the Chesapeake Bay. Camp Kinsale is an educational program of the Kinsale Waterfront Fund. If you are interested in the 2027 Camp Kinsale program, contact Annie and Asa at www.the-slips.com



It is very exciting for campers to explore a living oyster garden.



Led by Sue Borra, Master Oyster Gardener and TOGA member, campers conduct an oyster tank experiment to see how oysters clean the water.

TOGA Board of Directors: 2026				
*indicates a Master Oyster Gardener (MOG)				
Officers		locale	Phone	E-mail address
President	Carl Zulick*	Deltaville		carlz@togaboard.org
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	Richard Siciliano*	Heathsville	240.270.1439	richs@togaboard.org rjsiciliano@csmd.edu
	David Singletary	Newport News		dsingletary@togaboard.org
	Leigh Westfall*	Reedville		leighw@togaboard.org
Presidents Emeriti	Sue Borra*	Kinsale		sueb@togaboard.org
	Vic Spain*	White Marsh		vicspain@togaboard.org
VIMS Advisors	Karen Hudson (non-elected)			khudson@vims.edu
	Caelia Cackowski (non-elected)			ccackowski@vims.edu
				Updated: 9.19.26



**Welcome to our new
Board of Directors
members...**

Grant Mathews'

connection to the Chesapeake Bay runs generations deep, rooted in his family's longtime home in Deltaville, Virginia. Summers spent on the water there instilled a lifelong appreciation for the Bay's ecosystem and the watermen's way of life, planting the seed for a career that would eventually bring him back to those same waters professionally.

That connection led Grant to found [Waveland Oyster Company](#), where he grows and sells oysters to restaurants and individuals in the Richmond area and beyond. He's excited to bring to TOGA's board his hands-on industry experience and deep ties to the Bay, and looks forward to contributing to the organization's mission on behalf of the region's growers.

Leigh Westfall was born and raised in Arizona. After high school, he joined the Marine Corps making the service a career for the next 26 years. Following his time in the Marine Corps, he settled in Northern Virginia and worked for a defense contractor performing software

systems engineering and managing Information Technology (IT) projects for the Marine Corps. In 2015, he joined the National Science Foundation as the IT Project Manager and Branch Chief.

Leigh earned a Liberal Studies degree from Northern Arizona University. He holds Master's Degrees in Business Administration, Systems Engineering, and Management of Information Technology. Leigh is a Certified Project Management Professional with extensive leadership and management experience.

He and his wife purchased a weekend house in the Northern Neck in September 2017. After attending a TOGA event at Good Luck Cellars the following month, they began their oyster gardening experience using a borrowed float. Since then, he expanded his knowledge of oyster gardening and increased the size of his oyster garden. Having completed the Master Oyster Gardeners course at VIMS in 2020, he enjoys sharing his oysters with friends and neighbors. Leigh and his wife retired in 2025, making the Northern Neck their home and now have more time supporting TOGA and other interests.



Scouting for Oysters

~ Joshua Carter, Troop 94-Yorktown, VA

One year ago, if you had told me that my Eagle Scout project would involve oyster conservation, then I probably would not have believed you. I had developed one project proposal already, but I had faced multiple delays trying to reach the planning phase. Realizing that my family would be moving soon, I began searching for other potential projects. Fortunately, I soon found one through contacts at the Colonial Virginia Council and Tidewater Oyster Gardening Association (TOGA) which really excited me. It perfectly combined community service hours, conservation hours, and an educational element. Another Eagle Scout had previously led an oyster restoration effort at [Bluebird Gap Farm in Hampton](#) which needed educational signage to help visitors understand its importance.

The original project centered on a living shoreline along the Southwest Branch Back River. Bags of oyster shells placed along the shoreline would provide a habitat for oyster spat, or baby oysters, which would eventually grow into adults that will help filter the water and protect the shoreline from erosion. While the shoreline itself had already been established, the sign had not. In early June, I was given the opportunity to design and build the structure that would support a series of informational placards explaining how the project benefits the local environment.

After meeting with TOGA members David Singletary and Carl Zulick, and visiting the site at Bluebird Gap Farm, with staff such as Dawn Currier and volunteers like Linda Boone, I began developing designs for the sign using Autodesk Inventor. Through July, working with TOGA, Bluebird Gap Farm personnel, and leaders from Troop 94, I refined the design to accommodate ten educational placards and ensured it would fit the location along the Azalea Trail.

As I learned more about oysters and their conservation than I have before, I gained a reignited appreciation for how important oysters are to the health of the Chesapeake Bay. Oysters are natural filter feeders that remove nutrients and particles from the water, helping improve water quality. They also help stabilize shorelines by reducing erosion and creating habitat for other marine life. Educating visitors about these benefits



Matt Paluskiewicz, Mike Paluskiewicz, Nikolai Szymanski, and Jamie Johnson aligning the right post to the left post before concrete is poured, with (starting from left again) David Jimenez, Andrew Poler, Issac Valdez, and Davis Graham standing by.

is an important part of ensuring these restoration efforts continue to succeed.

Construction began in August with the help of scouts from Troop 94, along with my sister from Troop 205. One of the biggest challenges was digging the three-foot-deep post holes, which took much longer than expected and required an extra workday to complete. Despite the challenges, the project gave me valuable experience in leading volunteers, organizing work, and adjusting plans when necessary.

During construction, I also had the opportunity to visit the shoreline and see the oyster restoration project up close. Seeing the bags of shells and learning about the growth of the oysters made the purpose of the sign feel much more real. It was rewarding to know that the sign would help visitors understand both the shoreline itself and the important role oysters play in our local ecosystem. By the time this article is published, my family and I may already be living in Ottawa. However, the sign will remain at Bluebird Gap Farm, helping visitors learn about oyster conservation and the living shoreline for years to come. I am grateful for both the opportunity to continue this effort and to leave something behind.

(Continued on page 9)



The Finished Project: Starting from left - Joel Carter (my father), Josh Carter (me), Elizabeth Carter (my sister), Matt Paluskiewicz, Jack Braxton, Davis Graham, Mike Paluskiewicz, and Ben Paluskiewicz standing behind the finished structure in a celebratory photo.

OYS-101: Basics of Oyster Gardening-- a Free Educational Opportunity for All Oyster Enthusiasts

~Richard Siciliano, Master Oyster Gardener

This 90-minute class, taught by a seasoned oyster gardener, is intended for beginning oyster gardeners with waterfront property in Virginia's Northern Neck, Middle Peninsula, or Gloucester region, and who want to grow oysters for personal enjoyment. Following a step-by-step process, the class shows how to raise oysters successfully:

1. Analyzing and Evaluating Your Site
2. Choosing an Oyster Containment System
3. Gathering Seed Oysters (spat), Tools, and Supplies
4. Setting-up, Maintaining, and Harvesting
5. Applying for a Virginia Oyster Garden Permit
6. Seeking and Getting Help from Resources

This year, classes are taught monthly through November 2026. For a list of dates, times, and locations, go to the TOGA website: www.oystergardener.org/oyster-gardening-101. Then, contact Richard Siciliano to reserve a seat in this free class.

The next OYS-101: Basic Oyster Gardening class will be held on October 17, 2026, from 10:30 a.m. to 12 noon, at Camp Kekoka: 1083 Boys Camp Rd, Kilmarnock, in the "Community Hall" (blue/green meeting hall). To reserve a seat, contact the instructor, Richard Siciliano (text or call): 240-270-1439, or richs@togaboard.org

Awesome Oysters - Life on an Oyster Reef

Acrylic on Canvas 24x30 inches 2020

Brenda M. Silvia

An award winning professional artist from Richmond, Virginia, Brenda now lives in Reedville near the Chesapeake Bay. Passionate about nature and celebrating it in her artwork. Brenda paints in acrylics, often starting a painting on location and finishing it in her studio. When not painting, Brenda can be found outdoors hiking or kayaking. You can see her paintings at the *RAL Art Center* in Kilmarnock, *Objects* in Irvington, or on her website www.silverravenstudios.com

Brenda describes her inspiration for her painting *Awesome Oysters* after visiting a nearby oyster aquafarm in the Northern Neck:

In March of 2020, I certified as a Virginia Ecotour Guide. We concluded our final field trip at [Belle Isle State Park](#) with a stop at the nearby [Awesome Oysters](#) facility on Morattico Creek on the Rappahannock River. I met owner/operator Tom Jeffries who expressed interest in commissioning me to create a series of oyster-themed paintings to support the public educational goals of his oyster selling business. He is also interested in establishing a natural oyster reef to complement his aqua farming activities within his leased oyster habitat.

I'm very excited for the Tidewater Oyster Gardening Association (TOGA) to use my art work. I'm passionate about doing anything I can to help preserve and celebrate the natural world.





TOGA Visits Hayes-Gloucester Homeschoolers

~ Annie Hogge, Arise Collaborative Academy

On September 10, 2026, TOGA members Vic Spain (*left*) and Greg Jesseman (*back row, center*) visited students in grades 2 through 4 at [Arise Collaborative Academy](#), a homeschool co-op that meets at the Boys and Girls Club in Hayes (Gloucester). During this presentation, students were taught about the history of oysters in Virginia, the function of an oyster, how necessary they are to maintain the health of the Chesapeake Bay and surrounding waters, oyster hatcheries compared to growing in the wild, and the life cycle of an oyster. Students were able to observe various oysters and note similarities and differences, as well as see firsthand how oysters create a vital ecosystem for other marine life. TOGA provided materials for families who live on the water to learn more about oyster gardening. Students were encouraged to observe oysters in the wild next time they are on the shore of a local waterway.

About the *TOGA Newsletter*

Published three times a year (Winter, Spring, and Fall), the *TOGA Newsletter* **deadlines** for articles or photos are December 14, April 1, and August 20, respectively. Mailed and emailed to the home addresses of all current TOGA members, the *TOGA Newsletter* is also available to download electronically in full-color at oystergardener.org

Email your articles or photos to Richard Siciliano, editor: richs@togaboard.org

Introducing “Letters to the Editor”

Do you have a question or comment about TOGA’s events, the *Newsletter*, oysters, containment devices, or Chesapeake Bay aquaculture in general? If so, send an email to the *Newsletter* editor: richs@togaboard.org. Be sure to give your name, and if you have an oyster garden in your back yard, please provide us with its approximate location – town and body of water. Let us know your thoughts, suggestions, or anything related to oyster gardening, and we will publish your question or comment and our reply.

Float Building Days at Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock, Virginia, September 2026

~Jim Dall, MOG

A dedicated cadre of TOGA volunteers braved blistering hot weather, rain, and wilting humidity to meet every Thursday in September to build oyster floats and cages for the upcoming Fall '26 Float Sale at the Alexandria Police Youth Camp campus in Kilmarnock. Their hard work paid off. On behalf of TOGA, thanks go to every volunteer who participated, and to photographer Amy Geisel (amy_geisel@yahoo.com) for taking the time to document their efforts. The annual float sales would not be possible without them.



TOGA's thanks go to all float-building volunteers: Steve Angell, Sue Borra, Doug Converse, Jim Dall, Gene Disalvo, Bob Eadie, Anthony Gaiani, Amy & Guy Geisel, Eric Hentges Mark Hogan, Michael Hyde, Brian Ingram, Dave Jayne, Greg Jesseman, Terry Lewis, Ed & Nancy Matricardi, Brian Moran, Steve Montgomery, Doug Schaefer, Doug Sier, Vic Spain, Ed Walker, and Leigh Westfall, et al.

TOGA Presents to Middle Peninsula Master Naturalists

~Carl Zulick, MOG, TOGA President

On August 29, Ed Walker (MOG Candidate) and Carl Zulick presented "Oysters and the Chesapeake Bay" to 65 new and well-seasoned Master Naturalists at the Deltaville Community Center. After Master Naturalist Pat Anderson introduced the speakers, Zulick and Walker presented a lively discussion about oysters, the Bay ecosystem, and the Bay's watershed. The audience of Naturalists, some of whom were scientists and former VIMS employees, contributed to the lively discussion, sharing their experiences researching oysters and the Bay. Ed Walker explained the uses of various cage designs and answered questions on site selection for successful oyster gardens.

The meeting was a wonderful opportunity for cross training and networking between members of two active environmental organizations. Master Naturalist and artist Brenda Sylvia generously gave TOGA free use of her painting "Awesome Oysters- Life on an Oyster Reef" (centerfold-pp. 10-11). Brenda explained "I'm very excited for TOGA to use it. I'm passionate about doing anything I can to help preserve and celebrate the natural world."

Are you receiving email and notices from TOGA? We often send important and timely email to all 650 TOGA members using our MailerLite software. Some TOGA members report not receiving these messages because they are being filtered as spam. Check your Spam Folder and please accept emails we send to you. They are not sales pitches; they represent seasonal O-gardening tips, notices of events, health and safety advice, requests for volunteers, and other important announcements. Also, make sure you provide your primary and secondary emails renewing your membership.

TOGA Membership Form

P.O. Box 2463, Gloucester, VA 23061

Mail this form to the address above, or join online: <https://www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member>

Date: _____ Check one: _____ New Member _____ Renewal _____ Annual Dues: \$25

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, and Zip Code: _____

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

Body of water where oysters will be grown: _____

_____ Check here if you use this form only to update your information (and not to paydues)

The Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) is a non-profit organization established in 1997 to promote the environmental health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, through oyster cultivation and by other means, and as a way of enjoying Virginia oysters. Because they are filter feeders, oysters remove bacteria and sediments from the water, making the local environment cleaner habitats for marine life, and the improved water quality encourages seagrass growth, which creates better habitats for fish. Our goal is to educate interested citizens of all ages in oyster aquaculture methods. Learn how you can grow oysters and help the Chesapeake Bay.

Algae Blooms in the Bay

~Karen L. Hudson, TOGA Liaison, and Shellfish Aquaculture Extension Specialist
Marine Advisory Program, Virginia Institute of Marine Science

It's been a while since we've had to deal with algae blooms, but as you may have noticed - it's happening. Here's what we know with links to more information. If you have any questions, please reach out. Printed below is from an email report sent to interested parties July 31, 2026. It provided a snapshot of information available and shared as of late July of this year. The algal bloom activity has changed rapidly over time and does not represent the current status of the bloom.

Kim Reece and others at Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) have been monitoring and sampling the blooms in partnership with the Virginia HAB task force. Kim noted that the species in the York River and in several other areas around the lower bay (Lafayette, some patches in the James and Elizabeth Rivers) is "marge" (*Margalefidinium polykrikoides*). Our colleagues at NOAA NCCOS (National Center for Coastal Ocean Science) shared the satellite image (see right).

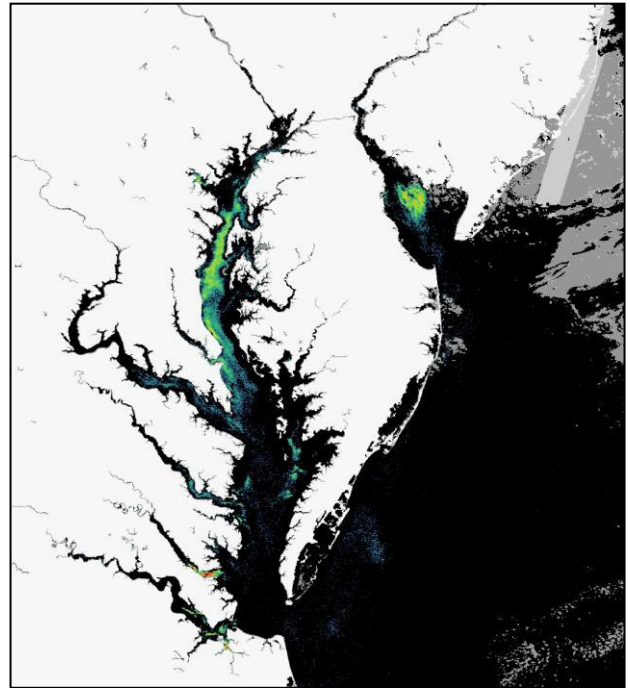
As a reminder: **There are no human health concerns with "Marge" and shellfish consumption.** But dense algae blooms can impact water quality and be problematic for shellfish health - primarily the smaller seed. If blooms linger for an extended time, they inhibit feeding which increases stress. Just keep an eye out. If you have questions - reach out!

Now testing an experimental harmful algal bloom forecast in the Chesapeake Bay:

Information and Tools available at your fingertips:

- VIMS HAB website: <https://www.vims.edu/bayinfo/habs/>
Contains ongoing research at VIMS, species guide, impacts, and much more
- VDH fact sheet on these seasonal York River (& lower CB) blooms: [VDH Waterborne Hazards HAB FAQs](#).
Most notably for harvesters: While these blooms discolor the water and may be associated with foul odors, they have not been tied to human health impacts. In fact, there has never been an algal toxin related human health illness from shellfish harvested in the state of Virginia.
- [VDH Harmful Algae Bloom \(HAB\) Dashboard](#) - map with bloom locations and sampling results with contact information to report dead fish and/or questions about human health impacts of algae blooms
- VIMS [Chesapeake Bay Environmental Forecast System](#) (CBEFS) - [Harmful Algae Forecasts](#)
CBEFS is a great tool for all things Bay water quality - temperature, salinity, pH and more. It allows you to see what's happening now, it predicts conditions a few days out and shows the trends (the change between the now and the forecasted conditions). A new feature is HAB map which forecasts the percent chance of encountering a HAB. Check it out!

HABS species in the York River and other areas in lower Bay (Lafayette, some patches in the James and Elizabeth Rivers) is "marge" (*Margalefidinium polykrikoides*). NOAA-NCCOS



TOGA High School Essay Contest Now Open

~Terry Lewis, MOG

The Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) is hosting our second popular High School Essay Contest. After sponsoring a successful Middle School Writing Contests for 11 years, TOGA changed the contest to offer it to high school students. The change was made because many high school students are anxious to earn money to help continue their education. Prizes will be \$500, \$250, and \$100 for first, second, and third places respectively for the top essays. A prize of \$200 will also be awarded to the school of the top entry. The theme of the essays is "Consider the Oyster," a wide open category that must include an essay that has something to do with oysters.

The competition is open to all Virginia high school students, including home-schooled students. Winners will be announced at the TOGA Membership Party near St. Patrick's Day, March 2027, at Camp Kekoka, Kilmarnock. The three top winning essays will be published on the TOGA web site and may be published in other publications or web sites.

The essays should be written in Microsoft Word format and attached to an e-mail. The submissions can be made by December 15, 2026. For more information, to view the entry form, and to see last year's winners and their essays, go to www.oystergardener.org, and enter [High School Writing Contest](#) in the Search tool.

"This contest has grown in popularity since it began more than ten years ago," said Terry Lewis, TOGA contest chair. "We encourage students to be creative, use their talents and imagination, and submit some fine essays. The students in this area have submitted more winning essays than any other area in Virginia, though we have had winners from as far away as Fairfax County and Richmond. This contest offers High School students a chance to win substantial prize money and help build a resume for their future endeavors. We look forward to more creative and excellent writing. So, if you are a High School student or know of an aspiring writer in high school, we strongly encourage you to consider entering this contest."

Download a copy of the rules:

Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association

High School Writing Competition

Open to all Virginia High School Students



Essay Theme:
"Consider the Oyster"

Prizes: \$500, \$250, \$100
\$200 Prize to the School of the First Place Entry

Contest Deadline: December 15

Go to www.oystergardener.org for more information.

Great chance to have your writing published!!



Register your entry at
www.oystergardener.org/youth-writing-competition

Download a copy of the rules for the TOGA High School Writing Competition

<http://www.oystergardener.org/youth-writing-competition>

TOGA Events (through February 2027)

September 2026

- 26 Saturday, 10:30 a.m. to 12 noon, OYS-101: *Basic Oyster Gardening*, Deltaville Maritime Museum, Holly Point Market, 287 Jackson Creek Road, Deltaville, VA 23043. Seating is limited, so sign up in advance. Contact Richard Siciliano, text: 240270-1439, or email: richs@togaboard.org

October 2026

- 3 & 4 Saturday (12 noon--5:00 p.m.) & Sunday (12 noon - 4:00 p.m.): TOGA Booth at Yorktown Wine and Oyster Festival, Riverwalk Landing, Yorktown, Point of contact is to be determined.
- 3 Saturday 1:00 – 4:00 p.m., Northern Neck Land Conservancy Boots and BBQ - TOGA Educational Exhibit, Lawson Bay Farm, White Stone, VA. Contact: Sue Borra sueb@togaboard.org or Douglas Schaefer: subiceguy@hotmail.com
- 8 Tuesday, 10:00 a.m.--12 noon: TOGA Board of Directors Meeting, River Counties Community Foundation, 834 Rappahannock Dr, White Stone. Contact: Carl Zulick carlz@togaboard.org for access
- 10 Saturday, 9am-noon: TOGA Members Build Your Own (BYO) Float Workshop, Camp Kekoka, 1083 Boys Camp Rd, Kilmarnock. Pre-orders for BYO required by October 1, 2026. Contact: Jim Dall, jimd@togaboard.org
- 13 Tuesday, 10am-noon: TOGA Board of Directors Meeting, Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Davis Hall Rm 101, 1370 Greate Rd, Gloucester Point, Contact Carl Zulick carlz@togaboard.org for access
- 17 Saturday, 9am--12 noon: TOGA Fall Oyster Float and Spat Sale at Camp Kekoka, 1083 Boys Camp Road, Kilmarnock. Pre-orders close on October 1. Walk-ups welcome. Membership required to purchase floats, Contact: Jim Dall: jimd@togaboard.org ; Vic Spain, vicspain@rocketmail.com
- 17 Saturday, 10:30 a.m.--12 noon: OYS-101: *Basic Oyster Gardening*: Camp Kekoka, 1083 Boys Camp Rd, Kilmarnock, in the blue/green meeting hall. To reserve a seat, contact Richard Siciliano, (text or call): 240-270-1439, or richs@togaboard.org (NOTE: TOGA's Oyster Float and Spat Sale is held on this date and at this location from 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon).
- 24 Saturday 9:00 a.m.--2:00 p.m., TOGA Information Booth-"Oysters and the Chesapeake Bay and Community Conservation Day," Deltaville Library, 35 Lovers Lane, Deltaville VA. Join York River Steward, Virginia Cooperative Extension and Middlesex County Public Library and other community organizations to learn about conservation and recreation efforts on the Middle Peninsula and how you can get involved. Registration suggested- free shrubs and trees to Mathews and Middlesex County residents. Contact: Carl Zulick: carlz@togaboard.org or leslianne.hammond@yorkriversteward.org (for registration)

November 2026

- 5 Thursday, 9:00 a/m—3:30 p.m. [Urbanna Oyster Festival Marine Science Legacy Program Day](#), Town Marina at Upton's Point, 210 Oyster Road, Urbanna, VA 23175. For information or to volunteer to assist, contact Richard Siciliano, text: 240-270-1439, or email: richs@togaboard.org
- 6 Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.: Oyster Day at Booker T. Washington Middle School, Newport News. Closed Event. Contact: Vic Spain, vicspain@rocketmail.com; or Dan Ellis, daniel.ellis@nn.k12.va.us
- 10 Tuesday, 10 a.m.--12 noon: TOGA Board of Directors Meeting, Deltaville Maritime Museum, 287 Jackson Creek Road, Deltaville, Contact Carl Zulick: carlz@togaboard.org for access

December 2026

- 8 Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. – 12 noon: Toga Board of Directors Meeting, Virtual Google Meet, Contact: Carl Zulick: carlz@togaboard.org for access.

January 2027

- 12 Tuesday, 10:00 a.m. – 12 noon: TOGA Board of Directors Meeting. River Counties Community Foundation, 834 Rappahannock Dr, White Stone. Contact Carl Zulick: carlz@togaboard.org for access

February 2027

- 27 Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. - OYS-101: *Basic Oyster Gardening*: (before the annual meeting). Virginia Institute of Marine Science, Davis Hall, 7539 Spencer Rd, Gloucester Point. To reserve a seat, contact Richard Siciliano, (text or call): 240-270-1439, or richs@togaboard.org
- 27 Saturday, 1:00–5:00 p.m. TOGA Annual Meeting, with Social Hour, VIMS Davis Hall, 7539 Spencer Road Gloucester Point, VA 23062, Contact: Carl Zulick carlz@togaboard.org

TOGA Oyster Float and Spat Fall Sale

**Camp Kekoka, 1083 Boys Camp Rd, Kilmarnock, VA 22482. October 17, 2026: 9 am to 12 noon.
Orders must be placed by October 1, 2026.**

We prefer that you order floats online at www.oystergardener.org/fall-float-sale. Alternatively, you may fill out this form and mail to **TOGA, PO Box 2463, Gloucester, VA 23061**, or email a copy to vicspain@rocketmail.com.

Purchasing TOGA-built floats is a membership benefit. Join TOGA or update your dues for 2026. If you are unsure of your dues status, check the address label on the back of the last newsletter you received in the U.S. Mail. You should see 2026 or 2027 if dues are up to date. Contact: vicspain@rocketmail.com if you have a question. To join or update your membership status, see www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member. Payment for floats and devices is due when floats are picked up. Checks or cash are preferred, but VISA and MasterCard will be accepted. Pick up your floats by 12 noon on the date and location of the sale, or notify Vic Spain: vicspain@rocketmail.com to make arrangements for pickup.

Qty.	Cost each for TOGA members	Description		Qty.	Cost each for TOGA members	Description
	\$145	Classic Taylor Float with top			\$80	Flip Float
	\$115	(New) Taylor ² Float with top			\$65	Rough Rider
	\$85	Bottom Cage			\$75	Tidal Tumbler
	\$35	Spat Tube (small mesh)			\$60	Bender 42 inch
	\$35	Spat Tube (medium mesh)			\$20	Minnow Trap Spat tube,
	\$10	4-liter molded float			\$20	9mm mesh Boxed Bag
	\$65	Mini Tidal Tumbler				

***Build-Your-Own Floats at the TOGA Float Build Workday: October 10, 2026
Camp Kekoka: 1083 Boys Camp Road, Kilmarnock, Virginia, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.***

3 float or cage limit, **\$25 discount** per float or cage. (*Spat tubes are not eligible for BYO discount*). For the discount, participate in at least one workday before the sale on Oct. 17, 2026, held at Camp Kekoka. For details, contact Jim Dall: jimd@togaboard.org

I would like: _____ (quantity): Taylor Floats with top at \$120 per float.

I would like: _____ (quantity): Flip Float at \$55 per float.

I would like: _____ (quantity): Bottom Cages at \$60 per float

I would like: _____ (quantity): Tidal tumbler at \$50 per float.

I would like: _____ (quantity): Mini Tidal Tumbler at \$40 per float.

I would like: _____ (quantity): Rough Rider at \$40 per float.



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TOGA Membership Form

P.O. Box 2463, Gloucester, VA 23061

Mail this form to the address above, or join online: www.oystergardener.org/become-a-member

Date: _____ Check one: _____ New Member _____ Renewal Annual Dues: \$25

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, and Zip Code: _____

Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

Body of water where oysters will be grown: _____

_____ Check here if you use this form only to update your information (and not to pay dues)

The Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) is a non-profit organization established in 1997 to promote the environmental health of the Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, through oyster cultivation and by other means, and as a way of enjoying Virginia oysters. Because they are filter feeders, oysters remove bacteria and sediments from the water, making the local environment cleaner habitats for marine life, and the improved water quality encourages seagrass growth, which creates better habitats for fish. Our goal is to educate interested citizens of all ages in oyster aquaculture methods. Join TOGA today. Learn how you can grow oysters and help the Chesapeake Bay.

Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association
PO Box 2463
Gloucester, VA 23061

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Growing Oysters for a Cleaner Bay