

Obliging Oysters

Believe it or not, oysters make up a very important part of our everyday lives. They act as filters in earth's waters, habitats for various plants and animals and they can even be healthy for our bodies and appetizing for our mouths. These fascinating bivalves are an imperative component to our beautiful bays.

Did you know that oysters can be a huge help to the environment around you? Without oysters the waters that surround us would be overflowing with slimy green algae and reeking dead fish would be washed onto the shores of the beautiful beaches nearby. To prevent these awful tragedies from occurring, the oysters filter the nitrogen out from the water. Eventually, without the oysters help, the large amounts of nitrogen would increase the growth of algae in the water causing oxygen levels to diminish which in return would decrease the population of fish and other sea creatures. One oyster can filter approximately fifty gallons of water a day! When the oysters lay their eggs the spat venture to nearby oyster bars in which they attach themselves and live the rest of their lives, creating a safe hideout for fish and other animals. The oyster's massively extensive reefs also construct a habitat for underwater creatures, including skillet fish, hooked mussels, whip mud worms, sea squirts, sea anemone, barnacles, fan worms, and mud crabs. Providing a better habitat and atmosphere for us and the animals living below the surface, is only one of the amazing things the oysters do for our beautiful bays.

For centuries watermen have been farming and harvesting plump oysters for their deliciously delectable meat, which is often considered a delicacy. Some of these enormous

oysters have even been measured to be twelve inches or one foot long. The most common edible oyster of North America is the breed *Crassostrea Virginica* and is best to be eaten between September and April, which happen to be the months that contain the letter R in them. Generally oysters are eaten either fried or raw, but they can also be steamed, grilled, or even found in a creamy stew. As the years have passed many oyster recipes have been created. While there are many ways to prepare a tasty oyster, one of the most popular recipes is Oysters Rockefeller. This delicious dish, which originated in New Orleans, Louisiana, consists of an oyster by the half shell, smothered with a rich buttery sauce, garnished with fresh herbs and golden-brown bread crumbs, and finally topped with a sour, juicy lemon wedge. Considering oysters are a plentiful source of Iron, Magnesium, Phosphorus, Zinc, Copper, Manganese, Selenium, and Vitamins D and B12, oysters can be very healthy for keeping your body energetic, giving your bones strength, and keeping your brain healthy, as well as being delicious.

Oysters and their extensive reefs are just one of the many sea creatures that take a crucial part in helping to maintain the thriving bays of Maryland and Virginia. In addition to helping our ecosystem, these beautiful bivalves can be a tasty treat to our taste buds as well as provide many of the essential vitamins and nutrients our body needs to stay healthy. The next time you see an oyster in the bay or rivers around you, or find an oyster in the food you are slurping, munching, or devouring, remember the many uses and benefits that oysters provide us.

Bibliography

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