

## The Amazing Oyster

Summer fun at the Jersey Shore does not end after Labor Day. For instance, this weekend plan to be in Asbury Park for the not-to-be-missed Oysterfest. And while you are munching on these delicious bivalves, why not dazzle your family and friends by dropping a few of these amazing oyster facts.



1. Oysters are nature's Brita filter. Each day, a healthy oyster filters about 50 gallons of water. At that rate, a one acre oyster reef cleans up to 24 million gallons of water a day – enough to fill 36 Olympic-sized swimming pools.
2. Oysters are very nutritious. A serving (approximately four yummy oysters) supplies about five grams of protein. They're also high in calcium, potassium, magnesium, vitamin B-12, zinc, iron, and they are cholesterol-free. But sorry to say, there seems to be no truth to the idea that they are an aphrodisiac.
3. Oyster reefs offer natural protection from storms and sea level rise by absorbing wave energy which reduces erosion, flooding, and property damage. Plus unlike, manmade barriers such as bulkheads, they don't cost a lot to build or maintain and they provide important habitat for fish and other sea creatures.
4. And how about pearls? First of all, natural pearls are extremely rare and don't grow in the types of oysters we eat, so don't expect to find one on your next seafood platter. Pearls form inside an oyster when a foreign substance like a grain of sand slips in between the oyster's body and its shell. This is uncomfortable for the tender oyster, so it covers the irritant with layers of nacre, or mother of pearl, the same substance it used to build it's the shell. This eventually

forms a pearl. Nacre is similar to saliva, so you would not be wrong to say that a pearl is just a very good looking spitball!

5. Forget the old advice to only eat oysters during months that contain the letter “R.” Thanks to developments in food science and safety, farmed oysters are “good-eats” year-round. Long ago, however, this was good advice. Refrigeration back then wasn’t the best, and since wild oysters reproduce in summer, leaving them alone during “R-less” months allows them to spawn in peace. Also, when spawning, wild oysters turn mushy and some say are much less tasty. But today, strict consumer protections are in place, plus scientific research has given us oysters that are disease resistant and non-reproducing (like seedless watermelons and cucumbers). These farmed oysters never spawn, so they don't get “mushy” during the summer.

6. Our local waterways used to be loaded with oysters. When Henry Hudson first sailed into the Hudson, the New York Harbor and Raritan Bay contained nearly half of the world’s oyster population. Up until the late 1800s, oysters were so plentiful and cheap in New York City that they were sold from pushcarts on the streets like hot dogs are today.