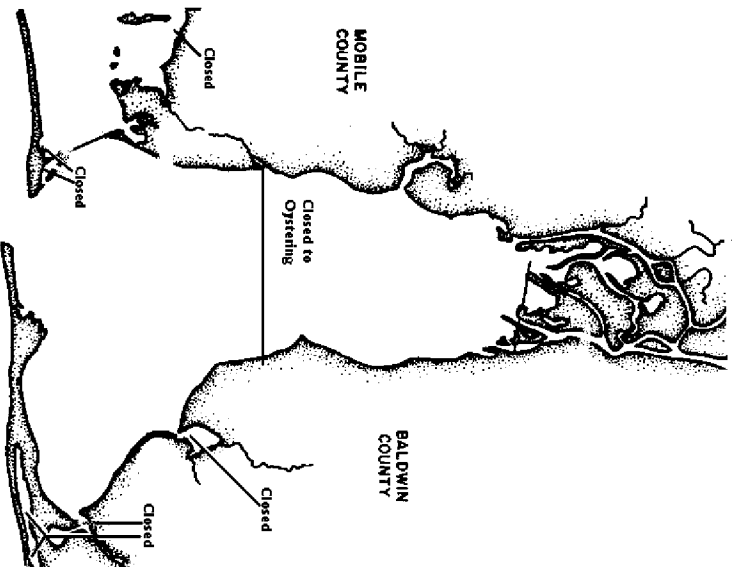


Please answer the following questions for our reference information. **These questions will not affect your application** as an oyster gardener.

1. Do you have access to freshwater plumbing at your pier?
 Yes No
2. Do you have experience as a volunteer in the Master Gardener or other similar program?
 Yes No

For More Information

The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (MBNEP) in cooperation with Auburn University and the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium is sponsoring this oyster gardening project. For more information, contact the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program at (251) 431-6409 or by e-mail at mhnep@mobilebaynep.com.



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 Alabama Cooperative Extension System
 Alabama Sea Grant Extension Program
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Selecting an
Oyster
 Gardening Site
 in Mobile Bay

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Selecting an Oyster

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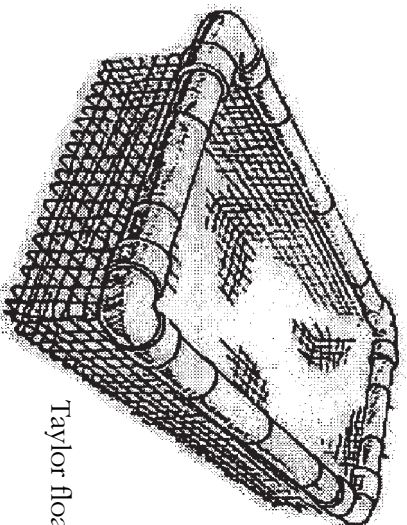
The Eastern oyster, *Crassostrea virginica*, is an important commercial shellfish species for Alabama and Mississippi. Total landings for the 1997-98 season were 3.5 million pounds of meats valued at \$5.3 million. Recent figures indicate that Alabama ranks first in the nation for oyster processing. Regionally, the Gulf of Mexico led in oyster landings with 59 percent of the national total. However, annual oyster production is highly variable from year to year due primarily to natural environmental and predator fluctuations.

Considerable state and regional oyster research along the Gulf Coast, including studies on oyster aquaculture, is being conducted for this valuable industry. Oyster farming consists of producing oyster larvae, setting the larvae, protecting the juveniles (spat), and then "planting" in natural waters with various degrees of control. Methods of growing oysters can range from scattering the spat on the bottom to maintaining spat in an enclosed structure on some kind of support float, frame, or belt.

Small-scale oyster aquaculture gardening programs exist in Maryland and Virginia as a means of restoring the oyster population and improving water quality in the Chesapeake Bay. Volunteers grow oysters in the Chesapeake Bay by utilizing floatable rigid nets, such as Taylor floats, attached to private piers. Coordinating organizations provide spat-on-shell to volunteers who monitor the oysters and maintain the cages. Oysters are grown inside the cages until they are approximately 3 inches long. They are then stocked onto oyster reefs to enhance the restoration efforts in the Chesapeake Bay.

Successful implementation of an oyster gardening program in Mobile Bay will provide benefits to the coastal community. Oyster gardening should help improve the bay's water quality and may accelerate the establishment of sustainable oyster populations on existing or constructed oyster reefs. Oyster reefs, in turn, provide excellent habitat for 300 species, including a variety of fish and crabs.

An oyster gardening program can bring intangible benefits, including greater public awareness of how oysters improve the bay's water quality by filtering algae and other suspended food particles from the water. The public will also gain a greater understanding of the cultural importance of Mobile Bay's oyster industry and the potential role small-scale oyster aquaculture has to restore oyster reefs.



Taylor float

Site Assessment

To determine if your location is acceptable for oyster gardening, please complete the following assessment. You must answer yes to the following questions to qualify for the oyster gardening program.

1. Are you a resident located on the water with a pier or landing?
_____ Yes _____ No
2. Is your property in the conditionally approved oyster growing areas, according to the map provided?
_____ Yes _____ No
3. Does the tide ever recede beyond the end of your pier and expose the bottom for more than 2 hours?
_____ Yes _____ No
4. Do you reside at this residence year round?
_____ Yes _____ No
5. Are you willing to spend 1 to 2 hours per week caring for the oysters until they are ready for reef restoration?
_____ Yes _____ No
6. Are you willing to allow a person working on this project to check the oysters' growth and water quality parameters at your pier once per week for the duration of the project?
_____ Yes _____ No