



SHELLFISH AND AQUACULTURE SERIES

The Mighty Quahog

There is nothing more quintessential Rhode Island than the quahog, designated our state shell in 1987. Generations of Rhode Islanders have dug quahogs, and its influence on Rhode Island life was successfully parodied by Providence Journal cartoonist and author Don Bousquet.

Yet outside of Rhode Island and New England, the name Quahog is mostly known as the name of the fictional town in the animated comedy series "Family Guy," created by a RISD student.

The name quahog is derived from the Narragansett word "poquahock," and the deep purple of the quahog shell is a prominent feature of wampum jewelry. Its scientific name *Mercenaria mercenaria* is from the Latin word for wages, as Europeans modified the purely ceremonial role of wampum in Native American society. For roughly a decade in the mid-1600's wampum was officially recognized as a currency by the Massachusetts Bay Colony, with the purple beads (quahog) worth twice as much as the white (whelk) beads.

Block Island is the only place in Rhode Island with local control over its shellfishing, and every year the New Shoreham Shellfish Commission adds, or seeds, legal size quahogs in the portion of the Great Salt Pond that is open for year round clamming. Residents and visitors must have a shellfish license and adhere to quantity and size regulations.

The quahog has many unique names based on shell size, and culinary use reflects these size differences. For example, small and tender littlenecks are best eaten whole – raw or steamed, while the larger cherrystones and chowders are usually chopped and used in chowders and stuffies.

Grow rates vary due to local conditions, but generally a legal clam with a one inch hinge thickness will be three to four years old.



OUR MISSION: To protect and enhance the environmental quality of the Great Salt Pond, including its shorelines and wetlands, and to promote appropriate and productive uses of the Pond's resources by residents, visitors and local businesses.

FUNDING: Individual contributions, membership dues, special events, program grants. IRS 501(c)3 non-profit. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Please consider becoming a member of The Committee for the Great Salt Pond. For information and details, visit our website at cgspblockisland.org.