

# Learning to Dig Softshell Clams

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**Step 1** Connect with shellfish harvesters or the shellfish warden by stopping by the town office, attending a municipal shellfish meeting, OR calling the local shellfish warden.

- \* Ask if the warden or municipal shellfish committee members would be willing to attend the field trip and help instruct students on how to dig softshell clams
  - \* Ask if the warden or municipal shellfish committee have clam rakes they may be willing to let the students borrow during the field trip
  - \* Ask the warden for permission for the students to dig and keep softshell clams they find (legal softshell clams are 2 inches long, lengthwise)
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A commercial harvester assists a Phippsburg student to measure a clam to see if it is legal to keep. Photo by Casco Bay Estuary Partnership.

**Step 2** Identify a clam flat to visit.

- \* Ask the warden or municipal shellfish committee member for suitable locations that are open for digging
- \* Keep in mind: ease of access for bus pick-up and drop off; do you need to cross private property and if so, get permission from the landowner; is the clam flat productive for digging, i.e. will students find clams?
- \* If there is not a suitable clam flat in your town, an option could be to investigate access from state owned lands. For example: Reid State Park in Georgetown has access to clam flats and visitors can dig up to 1 peck of clams without a license.



This clam flat in Phippsburg is open to commercial digging and open to visits by students with permission from the town's Shellfish Conservation Committee. Photo by Casco Bay Estuary Partnership.

**Step 3** How to find clam rakes and prepare students.

- \* Clammers wear down their clams rakes, also called clam hoes, over time, and they sometimes have old rakes that are no longer useful for commercial harvesting. These worn rakes could be borrowed by students for the field trip.
- \* The day of the field trip, students should wear old clothing that can wet and muddy as well as mud boots to protect their feet. Encourage students to bring a change of clothing to school in case they get really dirty on the flats.



A Phippsburg student borrows a worn clam rake to dig clams. Photo by Casco Bay Estuary Partnership.

## Step 4 Day of the Field Trip

### \* Timing:

- Plan for at least 60 minutes onsite for: safety talk, clamming demonstration, digging, and clean-up.

### \* Supplies list:

- clam rakes
- first aid kit
- plastic bags for students' dug clams and for muddy clothing
- clam measurement rings (cut 2-inch PVC pipe into ~1/4 inch rounds)

### \* Safety Talk Tips:

- Clam rakes have sharp tines therefore NO running while holding one and NO swinging it around.
- Always be aware of people around you so no one gets poked or hurt!
- Stuck in the mud? Point your toe and lift your heel to break the mud-suction on your boot.
- When not in use, clam rakes should be stored with the sharp tines in the mud.
- If feeling for clams in the mud or sand, be careful near the edges of clam shells. They are thin and can cause cuts (like paper cuts) on the tips of fingers.

### \* Demonstration:

- Ask a warden or clammer to demonstrate how to dig a softshell clam.
- If students have dug before, perhaps ask them to help other students who have not dug clams before.
- Visit these resource links for information on shellfish harvesting rules:
  - ⇒ Maine Dept. of Marine Resources (DMR) Shellfish Identification: [www.maine.gov/dmr/shellfish-sanitation-management/shellfishidentification.html](http://www.maine.gov/dmr/shellfish-sanitation-management/shellfishidentification.html)
  - ⇒ Maine DMR General Town Shellfish Information: [www.maine.gov/dmr/shellfish-sanitation-management/programs/municipal/ordinances/towninfo.html](http://www.maine.gov/dmr/shellfish-sanitation-management/programs/municipal/ordinances/towninfo.html)

### \* Clean-up Tips:

- Students should try to rinse off mud or sand on clam rakes and their boots, if possible. Using puddles on the flats can work well.
- Pass out trash bags for students to sit upon on the bus if there's no good place to rinse off clothing or change out of muddy clothing onsite.



Clammers are local experts to teach why protecting local marine resources is important. Photo by Casco Bay Estuary Partnership.



Students will discover a variety of marine critters in the mud. Photos by Casco Bay Estuary Partnership.

