

# Florida Seafood At Your Fingertips LIVE!

## Oysters on the half shell with shallot mignonette sauce

### What you will need:

1 dozen oysters, freshly shucked

Sliced lemons for the oysters

¼ cup of your favorite vinegar (red or white wine, champagne, or rice vinegar), or combine!

1 tablespoon minced shallot

¼ teaspoon of coarsely ground black pepper, or to taste

Lemon juice and/or zest, to taste

**Difficulty of recipe:** Simple

**Total time to make:** 10-15 minutes

### Recipe instructions:

1. Slice lemons and prepare mignonette sauce before shucking oysters. Mix sauce ingredients and set aside in the refrigerator.
2. Shuck oysters carefully and place on serving dish. (Will cover seafood safety tips – selecting oysters for quality and safe shucking). If shucking lots of oysters at one time place shucked oysters on their serving dishes in the refrigerator.
3. Squeeze lemons and/or add sauce to oysters, to taste.
4. Slurp and enjoy! Wash down with your favorite white wine.

### Species Profile:

The eastern oyster is the predominant oyster species along the eastern seaboard of North America and the throughout the Gulf of Mexico (geographic range – Canada (Gulf of St. Lawrence) to Yucatan, Mexico (Gulf of Mexico). Large adults are typically found at sizes ranging from 3-5” in length, but can grow larger. Depending on their latitudinal location, they can attain wild harvestable size (3”+ length) between 2-4+ years, with slower growth rates in more northern climes. In prehistoric shell middens, large oysters are found in greater frequency than what is commonly found in oyster shells from colonial times to the present, potentially indicating harvest pressure from modern man. Although reproductive maturity is generally considered to be around 3”, they can become reproductively active within the 1<sup>st</sup> year of life.

The eastern oyster is well known for its role as a keystone species and ecosystem engineer, providing filtration, shoreline stabilization, and creating reef habitat that supports high estuarine biodiversity. The eastern oyster can filter up to 20-50 gallons of water per day (adults) and it’s hypothesized that historical (back to the 1600’s) populations in the Chesapeake Bay were capable of filtering the entire volume of the Bay in less than a week. Oysters are the dominant reef forming organism in temperate waters, only surpassed by corals in tropical regions. In S. Florida, oysters are a key indicator species for Everglades restoration success.

Recreational wild harvest of oysters is allowed for animals of 3” shell length or greater. Recreational shellfish harvesting is allowed in the Western, Central, Big Bend and Southern regions of the Gulf of Mexico and from Fort Pierce Inlet in St. Lucie County to the Tolomato River in St. Johns County on the Atlantic Coast. Harvest is generally closed during the summer months (June-September), with some variation depending on the region. For more specific details on fishery regulations consult <https://myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/shellfish/>.

Oyster farming is a burgeoning new industry in Florida. Aquaculture of oysters in Florida has grown in recent years mostly on the Gulf coast, but also a few on the east coast. Florida Sea Grant has been instrumental in training and transfer of technology to prospective oyster farmers. Private hatcheries in Florida provide oyster seed to the industry. To learn more visit: <https://shellfish.ifas.ufl.edu/> and <https://www.fdacs.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Aquaculture/Shellfish>.

**Health benefits:** Oysters have the highest zinc content of any food, providing over 600% of the Reference Daily Intake per 100 g serving (USDA). Zinc has been shown to modulate the inflammatory response, improving response to infection. They are also high in the essential vitamin B12 (>300% RDI per 100 g) and omega 3 fatty acids. Raw oysters with a splash of lemon juice (Zinc + Vitamin C) may be the ultimate natural immune booster!

**Where to buy:** Your local seafood market. Several aquaculture farms sell direct to consumer as well. You can still buy quality oysters during the summer months (the non-“R” months) from Florida oyster farmers. Many of them sell triploid oysters that do not spawn, and therefore remain meaty during the warm months. The advice to only eat oysters during the R months descended from historical fishery regulations that prevented harvesting during the summer, non-R, months to allow oysters to reproduce (an early sustainable practice!) and not because of concerns over shellfish safety. That being said, warmer waters still carry a greater risk of bacteria. Nowadays, however, shellfish leases are regularly monitored for good water quality to ensure a safe product. Shellfish beds will close if water quality is impaired (high bacterial counts and/or during harmful algal blooms). Even in good water quality, there are strict guidelines for handling and processing shellfish from harvest to wholesaler, which are even stricter from May to September. For more info visit: <https://www.fdacs.gov/Agriculture-Industry/Aquaculture/Shellfish>.

Always ask to see the processing tag to see where and when oysters were harvested. Try to choose your own oysters. If they are open, they are dead and do not select those (and inform your seafood monger). You can rap oysters with another one, and if they sound hollow and are light in weight compared to others, don't select them. However, always keep in mind that eating raw shellfish still carries a risk, and if you have a chronic illness of the liver, stomach or blood, or have an immune disorder you are at greater risk from raw shellfish. If you have any concerns about eating raw oysters, you can always cook your oysters (future follow up recipe?). For more info on safely eating raw oysters visit: <https://www.fdacs.gov/Food-Nutrition/Food-Safety-Resources/Food-Safety-Raw-Oysters>.

keep it simple without endorsing – maybe include a list of seafood providers already compiled by FDACS? Their seafood page also includes peak availability time frames:  
<https://www.fdacs.gov/Consumer-Resources/Buy-Fresh-From-Florida/Seafood-Products>);

**How to catch:** Can catch by (gloved) hand and if needed, an oyster knife or other tool to pry off oysters, in safe, harvest-approved waters. For more info on fishing regulations see:  
<https://myfwc.com/fishing/saltwater/recreational/shellfish/>

**Sustainability:**

Farmed oysters are widely recognized as a sustainable source of seafood ( see Seafood Watch - [https://www.montereybayaquarium.org/act-for-the-ocean/sustainable-seafood?gclid=CjoKCQjwjer4BRCZARIsABK4QeULgI5J3PZCTOJoqHwPjRWpn83ikwyrvrlyw45chxxl363\\_HmwoZhcaAnrqEALw\\_wcB](https://www.montereybayaquarium.org/act-for-the-ocean/sustainable-seafood?gclid=CjoKCQjwjer4BRCZARIsABK4QeULgI5J3PZCTOJoqHwPjRWpn83ikwyrvrlyw45chxxl363_HmwoZhcaAnrqEALw_wcB)), relying on natural phytoplankton for food, and causing minimal environmental impacts to surrounding waters.

**Seafood cost:** Moderate to Special Occasion