

Southern Hard Clam, *Mercenaria campechiensis*

Range and Habitat

Range: New Jersey to Florida and Gulf of Mexico
Salinity: >30 psu
Depth: Intertidal to 36 m
Habitat: Sandy bottoms; seagrass beds in estuaries
Size: 98-110 mm; up to 164 mm



Commercial Importance

Some recreational harvest occurs on both coasts. Historic commercial fisheries have been replaced by aquaculture. Commercial aquaculture production of hard clams relies upon the northern hard clam, *Mercenaria mercenaria*. At present, there is no aquaculture of the southern hard clam.

Ecological Importance

As suspension feeding infauna, southern hard clams graze primary production (phytoplankton) and filter out suspended particles from the water column. Through assimilation of phytoplankton and deposition of feces and pseudofeces, the southern hard clam transfers carbon and nitrogen to benthic food chains and sediments. Growth and survival of clams are greater in seagrass beds than in adjacent sandy areas, and there is evidence to suggest that hard clams enhance seagrass productivity through fertilization of sediments and improving water clarity.

Recovery & Restoration

Although hard clams were historically far more abundant in Florida's waters than today, the extent of their decline remains poorly understood. However, efforts to re-stock native clam populations in Florida bays and estuaries are on-going along both coasts. Our hypothesis is that the indigenous southern hard clam can promote seagrass growth by locally improving water clarity and transferring nutrients from the water column to seafloor below. The Gulf Shellfish Institute offers the following capabilities to any group interested in restoration projects involving clams:



- Production of juvenile (4 mm seed) clams in commercial hatcheries
- Seed grown on commercial leases (state-owned submerged land) until desired size (up to 60 mm) is attained
- Planting seed at desired density
- Monitoring of clam growth and survival, sea grass growth, and environmental parameters (sediment and water quality)