



# Eastern Oyster

Scientific name: *Crassostrea virginica*

TRY FILLING IN THE BLANKS ABOVE BY DRAWING ANIMALS THAT SHOULD LIVE ON THE REEF. OR AN OYSTER READY TO EAT!!

The Eastern Oyster is a bivalve mollusc (bi = two, valve = shell). Eastern Oysters live in bays, rivers, and estuaries on the east coast of the US and Canada, and in the Gulf of Mexico. They live in brackish water, (a mix of salt and fresh)

Do you like oysters? To many people they are just a food, but to the Bay, they are one of the most important inhabitants. Oysters are called a keystone species, because they help build the foundation of local ecosystems by building reefs and filtering water. Oysters eat algae and help clarify the water, allowing sunlight to reach the bottom and grow bay grasses called submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV). Each adult oyster can filter between 30-80 gallons of water each day.

Oysters are a food for some animals while providing a home for others. Small fish, crabs, and many other animals call an oyster reef home. Some animals like barnacles, tunicates, and anemones also help clean the water while living on an oyster reef.

At CCA Maryland, we work with students throughout the state to build artificial oyster reefs called a reef ball. You can see a reef ball in the image above, and find out more about our efforts at [ccamd.org/LRAC](http://ccamd.org/LRAC). Reef balls help jump start the three dimensional growth of an oyster reef, and make a great spot to go fishing!

If you like to eat oysters, you should try farmed raised oysters. These oysters are available all year round to eat, and while they are growing still help clean the Bay. Better yet, oyster farms provide important jobs for Maryland's working waterfronts, and are a sustainable and healthy protein for you! After eating oysters, don't forget to recycle their shells, so they can go back into the Bay where they belong, and help grow more oysters.