



Rangia Clam

What You Need to Know

The Rangia Clam

The rangia clam (*Rangia Cuneata*), also called the cocktail clam, is not harvested commercially in Maryland but is frequently collected by citizens for their own consumption. ***To ensure public safety, the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) strongly advises against gathering or consuming clams, or any shellfish, from waters not tested and protected by MDE's Shellfish Certification Division.***

Background

The brackish clam (*Rangia Cuneata*) is a Southern species that has recently colonized Northern Chesapeake Bay. The species was first discovered in the Potomac River in 1960. It inhabits low salinity habitats <10 ppt. Rangia clams are filter feeding organisms. They strain the surrounding water through their gills which trap and transfer food particles to their digestive system. If the water is contaminated with disease causing bacteria or viruses, the bacteria and viruses also are trapped and consumed as food. Concentrations of bacteria and viruses in rangia clams can reach dangerous levels in polluted waters. Because rangia clams are not commercially harvested, the waters where they are found are generally not protected for shellfish harvesting as are the waters for commercial crops such as the soft-shell clam and the oyster.

The rangia clam measures nearly two inches long and a little over an inch thick. They are often mistaken for the highly desirable "cherrystone" clam. Rangia clams primarily inhabit muddy bottoms in brackish areas where the salinity of the water seldom exceeds 10 parts per thousand. They are widely distributed in the brackish waters of the Potomac above the 301 Bridge and Upper Chesapeake Bay above Rt. 50 Bridge. Rangia clams seek fresh water. Their beds are found in Maryland waters where salt content is lowest. These locations are highly susceptible to pollution from urban and suburban storm drains and farms, failing septic systems and other sources.

The rangia clam has a muddy or earthy taste because it inhabits muddy bottoms. In Louisiana and other Gulf states where the clams are plentiful, they are harvested for the shell, which is used in roadbeds.

Contact Information

For more information about Maryland's shellfish safety call:

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