

Bivalve Shellfish Identification



Manila Littleneck Clam

Size and Shape: Up to 2.5 inches. Oblong (similar to native littlenecks but more oval).

Shell: Concentric rings with radiating line ridges. Siphon tips are split. Color can vary—typically grey, brown, or mottled. Some purple on the inside shell.

Depth: 2-4 inches.

Habitat: Gravel, mud, sand. Above the half-tide level.



Native Littleneck Clam

Size and Shape: Up to 3.5 inches. Rounded (similar to Manila clams but more round).

Shell: Concentric rings with radiating ridge lines. Siphon tips are fused. Color can vary – typically cream, grey, brown, or mottled. White inside shell.

Depth: 6-10 inches.

Habitat: Gravel, mud. Normally mid-tide level, sometimes lower intertidal or subtidal zone (up to 60 feet).



Butter Clam

Size and Shape: Up to 5 inches. Heavy for size. Oval to square.

Shell: Concentric rings. No radiating ridge lines. Yellow to grey/white colored.

Depth: 12-18 inches.

Habitat: Sand, gravel, cobble. Lower intertidal or shallow subtidal zone (up to 60 feet).

Warning! Butter clams retain marine biotoxins longer than other clams.



Varnish Clam

Size and Shape: Up to 3 inches. Oval, flat.

Shell: Concentric rings and shiny brown coating. Purple inside the shell.

Depth: 1-2 inches.

Habitat: Gravel, cobble, mud, sand. Upper one-third of the intertidal zone but can range into lower tidal level. Most abundant near freshwater inputs.

Warning! Varnish clams retain marine biotoxins longer and at higher levels than other clams.



Cockle Clam

Size and Shape: Up to 5 inches. Round, somewhat triangular (pointed hinge).

Shell: Prominent evenly-spaced radiating ridges which fan out from the hinge. Mottled, light brown color.

Depth: 1-2 inches.

Habitat: Sand, mud. Intertidal or subtidal zone (up to 50-60 feet).



Macoma Clam

Size and Shape: Up to 4 inches. Oval to square, to somewhat triangular.

Shell: Wafer-thin, chalky-white shell may be bent at siphon end.

Depth: 4-6 inches.

Habitat: Sand, mud. Middle intertidal zone.



Horse Clam

Size and Shape: Up to 8 inches. Oval.

Shell: Chalky-white with yellow/brown patches of "skin" on the shell. Shell gapes around siphon. Siphon can't be fully pulled into shell and has a leather-like flap on the tip.

Depth: 1-2 feet.

Habitat: Sand, mud, gravel. Lower intertidal zone (up to 50-60 feet).



Eastern Softshell Clam

Size and Shape: Up to 6 inches. Oval to square.

Shell: Brittle, thin shells with rough irregular surface and uneven concentric rings. Chalky-white to grey with brown/yellow skin on the edges. Rounded at foot, pointed at siphon end.

Depth: 8-18 inches.

Habitat: Sand, mud. Upper half-tide level near river mouths (low salinity).



Geoduck

Size and Shape: Shell up to 10 inches. Weighs an average of 2.5 pounds and up to 10 pounds. Oblong, appears rounded at one end and cut-off at the other end.

Shell: Gaping oblong shell with concentric rings. White shell with flaky brown skin. Siphon and mantle are too large to withdraw into shell.

Depth: 2-3 feet.

Habitat: Mud, sand, gravel. Subtidal zone (some intertidal, accessible only on extreme low tides).



Razor Clam

Size and Shape: Up to 6 inches. Oblong.

Shell: Gaping oblong shell with concentric rings. Brown shell. Siphon is too large to withdraw into shell.

Depth: 6 inches or more (moves rapidly downward when dug).

Habitat: Sand. Intertidal coastal zone (ocean beaches).



Mussels

Size and Shape: Blue mussel up to 3 inches. California mussel up to 6 inches. Oblong shape.

Shell: Blue-black or brown shell.

Habitat: Attaches to rocks, pilings, boats, gravel, or other hard surfaces in the intertidal zone.



Oysters

Size and Shape: Up to 12 inches for some species. Oblong with irregular, wavy edges.

Shell: Chalky white or grey.

Habitat: Rocky beaches in the intertidal zone.



Shellfish safety information: www.doh.wa.gov/shellfish

Clam photos: WDFW. Mussel photo: InspiredImages, Pixabay. Oyster photo: ThurstonTalk.

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