



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

CAPE COD PURSUITS

Clamming & Quahogging on Cape Cod: How to Get a License and Where to Dig

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.

There is something satisfying about earning your dinner from the tidal flats. You wade out at low tide, rake through the sand, feel the thud of a hard-shell quahog under your feet, and haul it into your basket.

You Must Have a License

Every person who harvests shellfish on Cape Cod is required to hold a valid shellfish permit issued by the town where they are digging. Licenses are inexpensive: resident licenses typically \$15–\$40/season, non-resident \$30–\$75/season.

Two Species, Two Techniques

Quahogs (Hard-Shell Clams)

The quahog is the prize. Sorted by size: littlenecks (raw), cherrystones (raw or grilled), and chowder clams (chowder or stuffies). Shuffle your feet slowly through the sand in shallow water — when you feel something hard and rounded underfoot, reach down.

Soft-Shell Clams (Steamers)

Live in muddy, silty tidal flats of protected coves. Look for small dimple holes in wet sand, then dig straight down 4 to 6 inches.

Where to Dig

Wellfleet

The shellfish capital of Cape Cod. Wellfleet Harbor and surrounding tidal areas offer some of the best recreational digging on the outer Cape. Get the constable map showing which areas are open — digging a private grant is trespass.

Barnstable

Barnstable Harbor and Sandy Neck tidal flat areas offer accessible quahogging for visitors and residents.

Orleans

Pleasant Bay, one of the largest coastal estuaries in Massachusetts. Bay-side flats are excellent for quahogs and soft-shell clams.

Eastham

Borders Orleans on Pleasant Bay with its own productive tidal flats. Family-friendly territory.

Brewster

Famous for extensive bay-side tidal flats — at low tide, the water recedes a half mile or more, exposing vast sandy expanses ideal for quahogging.

What to Cook

Steamers: Purge in salt water 4+ hours, then steam 8–10 minutes. Serve with strained broth and drawn butter.

Stuffed Quahogs (Stuffies): Chopped quahog meat mixed with chourico, breadcrumbs, and aromatics, packed back into the shell and baked at 375°F.

Quahog Chowder: Classic New England — no flour, thickened by potato starch and clam liquor, finished with cream and white pepper.

◆ THINGS TO DO

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