



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

CAPE COD PURSUITS

Tide Pooling on Cape Cod: Best Spots, What to Find & How to Explore

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

Somewhere between low tide and high tide, Cape Cod reveals a secret. The water pulls back, the flats appear, and suddenly the bottom of the bay is right there under your feet — alive with horseshoe crabs, hermit crabs dragging borrowed shells, periwinkles grazing on algae, and moon snails tunneling through wet sand.

Tide pooling on Cape Cod is one of the best free family activities the peninsula offers — and one of the most underrated.

Why Cape Cod Is Exceptional for Tide Pooling

The magic of tide pooling here is concentrated on the Cape Cod Bay side, where rocky shorelines, tidal flats, and salt marshes create extraordinary intertidal habitat. The Bay side also has a significant tidal range — often four to eight feet.

Best Tide Pooling Spots

Barnstable Harbor Tidal Flats

One of the best places on the Cape to see horseshoe crabs. Walk out from the town landing off Mill Way and the harbor bottom opens up in front of you.

Bass Hole / Gray's Beach — Yarmouth

A tidal flat stretching a quarter mile into the bay at low tide. The flat is sandy-muddy, easy to walk, and perfect for families.

Lieutenant Island — Wellfleet

At low tide, a road connects the mainland to Lieutenant Island. The exposed bottom is dense with clam holes, worm tubes, moon snails, and crabs.

Rock Harbor — Orleans

At low tide, the exposed flat reveals a patchwork of sand, eelgrass, and shallow pools that hold juvenile fish, crabs, and snails.

What You Will Find

- Horseshoe crabs — ancient arthropods, completely harmless
- Hermit crabs — carry borrowed shells, highly entertaining
- Fiddler crabs — males with one oversized claw
- Periwinkle snails — graze on algae, found in enormous numbers
- Moon snails — large predatory snails that drill into clam shells
- Soft-shell clams — their squirt holes reveal their presence
- Sand dollars — look but don't take live ones

Rules for Responsible Exploring

Look, don't take. Return things exactly where you found them. No commercial shellfishing without a license. Stay on the flat, not in the marsh.

What to Bring

Water shoes, a bucket or tray, a magnifying glass, sunscreen, and old clothes.

How to Read Tide Charts

Low tide — specifically the two hours before and two hours after — is the optimal window. Use the Tides Near Me app or NOAA Tides and Currents at tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov.

◆ THINGS TO DO

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