

Oyster culturing and harvesting helps clean Cape Cod waters

Nitrogen is an essential nutrient for plant growth, but when too much of it gets into the water it causes an overgrowth of algae. Nitrogen reaches coastal waters primarily by leaching from septic tanks **A** and running off higher land. Once in the water, nitrogen gets taken up by algae **B**. As oysters feed and grow, they help process the nitrogen by consuming the algae and using it to build their muscles and shells **C**. Some of the nitrogen in oyster waste is converted to a harmless gas (N_2) **D**. The nitrogen in oysters is removed from the bay when they are harvested **E**. Nitrogen removal is an important ecosystem benefit that comes from culturing and harvesting oysters.

