

# THE EAST HAMPTON STAR



SHINES FOR ALL

## Oyster Comeback: A Good Project

By Editorial | October 1, 2015 - 1:44pm

The East Hampton Town Trustees were approached recently about allowing a small pilot oyster-growing program in waters that they control. We believe it would be a good project and should be allowed.

What several residents and oyster-fanciers were talking about is something along the lines of something already happening in Southold and Southampton Town waters. Private growers would get fingernail-sized seed oysters from the East Hampton Town Shellfish Hatchery and raise them to edible size in floating cages or bags. Commercial sale is not the goal; the point is to engage residents more fully in the natural world, with a side bonus of giving them delicious shellfish to savor.

The community at large would reap a bonus, too, in that the oysters would be a kind of marine Johnny Appleseed, in line with the true, stealth genius of the Cornell Cooperative Extension-connected SPAT (Southold Project in Aquaculture Training) program, spat being a word for oysters when their larvae attach to a suitable substrate.

The beauty of the program is that individuals tend relatively small bunches of their own oysters, nursing them past the vulnerable youthful stage, keeping their enclosures free of potentially choking seaweed and other algal growth, and helping them avoid predators. It takes at least 18 months for such coddled shellfish to reach edible size; more time is better, as much as two or three years for a really nice specimen. During that time, the oysters would have spawned at least once, sending out millions of microscopic veligers to bolster the natural population.

Oysters are thought of as a kind of vacuum cleaner of the seas, thanks to their prodigious filtering capacity. Efforts are even under way to return New York Harbor's oyster beds to what they once were. Billions of planned oysters would, in theory, greatly rid the water of vast amounts of potential contaminants.

Around East Hampton Town, where concerns about surface waters are mounting, such an effort would be welcome — and tasty, too. Get those oyster knives ready!

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**Note:** This has been updated from a previous version. The source for the seed oysters would be the East Hampton Town Shellfish Hatchery, not the Southold Project in Aquaculture Training.