

Oyster shells from restaurants recycled into vertical gardens to improve ecosystem

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Vertical oyster gardens designed to improve water quality

Kimberly Kuizon reports.

BRADENTON, Fla. - A project is helping restaurants recycle oyster shells to help the environment.

Under docks in [Manatee County](#), you may find a cluster of oysters known as a vertical oyster garden.

"The shell that comes to us offers us a way to reframe our thinking on the waste that's produced from our community," explained Shaun Swartz.

It's a unique program, to help water quality.

Manatee County partners with STAR or Solutions to Avoid Red Tide and Sarasota Bay and Tampa Bay Estuary programs. Area restaurants help make it happen.

"It's sort of like a rebirth of the shell in a sense that the shell is recycled from local restaurants. It now gets used in a way that's productive for our marine habitat, but also helps build community," said Swartz, an environmental specialist with Manatee County's Department of Natural Resources.

Oyster shells are picked up from a number of restaurants and brought near Robinson Preserve, where they sit in the sun for about three to four months.

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"It allows time for it to cure, if you will, so bacteria doesn't get spread in our waterways and use shell in the program for creating vertical oyster gardens," said Swartz.

From there, they're built by hand and placed under docks.

"Putting vertical oyster gardens out in the environment promotes oyster growth under docks and scientists now know that oysters are capable of filtering water and removing nutrient pollution from our waterways. I like to think every little bit counts," he said.

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Eventually, marine life make the vertical oyster gardens their home.

They're available for residents to pick one up to place under their home docks as well.

The adoption station is at the Robinson Preserve NEST (840 99th St NW, Bradenton, FL 34209). Those interested in adopting the oysters must register before picking up.

"Just by virtue of eating oysters and supporting local restaurants you can become involved in this program and therefore that contributes to an overall improvement to the health and quality of our local ecosystem," stated Swartz.

Click [here](#) for more information or to pick up a vertical oyster garden.

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