

# FLOAT BAGS

Most beginning oyster growers are introduced to the Taylor float (PVC pipe ring attached to a wire cage) as the easiest way to start growing oysters. Named for Jake Taylor of the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, who did much of the designing and original testing of the float, the Taylor float could be the most recognized form of oyster aquaculture throughout the Chesapeake Bay.



Chesapeake Bay Oyster Company believes there is an easier, cheaper, and more efficient way to jump into oyster growing- **the float bag**. The float bag uses the same basic principle as the Taylor float; oysters grown near the surface of the water column do better because oxygen and food levels are at their highest. However, it is much easier to work with and keep clean (clean bag = more flow = bigger oysters!). Unlike the Taylor float, the float bag is much smaller and less bulky so it is easier to clean, easier to store, and much more inconspicuous. The entire system is UV protected and will last for many seasons.

## I'M STANDING ON MY DOCK WITH MY FLOAT BAG...NOW WHAT?

Once you have found a good spot, open the bag of seed oysters (called spat) and empty the contents into the float bag and close it.

Once the float bag is closed, attach the provided tag line to a dock line that is secured to some stationary object and place the bag into the water. Voila! You are growing oysters!

## MY FLOAT BAG HAS BEEN IN THE WATER FOR A FEW WEEKS AND I HAVE SOME EXTRA TIME ON MY HANDS...

Though your oysters do not require much work, we do suggest flipping your float bag every two to three weeks and giving it a few good shakes. Because part of the float bag sits above the water line, flipping the bag allows the sun to bake off any barnacles and algae that have grown on the underside. Shaking the bag causes the oysters to roll, which dislodges mud, algae, and small crabs from the float. It can also shape the bills of the oysters and give them a nice uniform appearance.

We also suggest you go through your float periodically (at least once a month) and remove dead oysters and any blue crabs (no matter the size) that may be living in your float. Dead oysters can be recognized by their open shells. Crabs should be removed as soon as possible. If not, they will treat your float like an all you can eat buffet.

## TIPS AND TRICKS

- Never consume your oysters if they are grown in condemned waters. Most small creeks in the Chesapeake Bay are condemned due to high nutrient and coliform levels that run off from land. Maps of condemned water are available from the Virginia or Maryland Departments of Health.
- Oysters can only be grown in salt water, even if salinity is as low as 5 parts per thousand. To determine the salinity at your site, we suggest you purchase a hydrometer. They can be purchased at most pet stores.
- During the colder months, make sure your oysters remain under water at all times. If you are using your float bag in an area prone to freezing over, we suggest you carefully remove the black plastic floats from the bag. This will allow the bag to sink to the bottom, keeping your oysters safe until the next growing season.
- Remember to adjust your dock line accordingly!
- Oysters can survive being frozen in a block of ice; however, they will not survive being exposed to air that is less than 32° F for extended periods of time. Because the float bag sits at the water's surface, there is a chance that the bag could rise up out of the water if a sheet of ice were to slide under it.
- Once the warmer months return, reattach the floats using 14" UV-resistant cable ties (available from us or at most home improvement stores.)
- When not in use, remove your empty float bag from the water so that the barnacles and algae that have grown on the bag will die and can be washed off.

## OTHER OPTIONS

Some of your oyster gardening peers have developed some pretty sophisticated systems for working their float bags, including long lines and pulley systems. The possibilities are endless and we encourage you to join the oyster gardening association in your area and meet people like yourself that are doing their part to help restore the health of Chesapeake Bay. There are many other oyster aquaculture systems available. When you are interested in pursuing other options, please contact us!

## RESOURCES

Chesapeake Bay Oyster Company – [www.bayoyster.com](http://www.bayoyster.com)

Tidewater Oyster Gardeners Association (TOGA) – [www.oystergardener.org](http://www.oystergardener.org)

Maryland Sea Grant Extension Program – [www.mdsg.umd.edu/oysters/garden/start.html](http://www.mdsg.umd.edu/oysters/garden/start.html)

Chesapeake Bay Foundation – [www.cbf.org](http://www.cbf.org)

Oyster Recovery Partnership – [www.oysterrecovery.org](http://www.oysterrecovery.org)