



THE SEVERN RIVER ASSOCIATION

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OCTOBER 2013 OYSTER NEWS

All of this year's spat set have been distributed, thanks to all the work by Tommy Price and the staff of the Oyster Recovery Partnership. The new baby oysters, born at Horn Point Lab near Cambridge, should be safe in their cages at your dock, where they will continue to work as a mini reef, long after the end of this boating season. I thanked ORP by attending their OysterFest at the Baltimore Aquarium, ate too many oysters, and enjoyed the best of all fundraisers on October 1.

The Severn River Association is delighted to welcome you as a contributor to this solution for the Severn (many for the fifth year). You are one of about 400 volunteers in the Severn River watershed enthusiastically embracing oyster gardening. Collectively, you are hosting 1,370 cages holding more than 400,000 spat.

If you have had the time and opportunity to examine your guests, you might be wondering what all the fuss is about. Spat can be a challenge to find and are not particularly appealing, looking something like a crusty, disc-shaped scale about the size of the end of a ball-point pen. This year's spat seemed larger than years' past, so perhaps will grow larger while in your cages. If you can't see them now, don't worry because by next spring, they should be healthy juvenile oysters approximately ½ inch in diameter and ready to populate the SRA sanctuary reef. Three years from now as fully mature oysters, they will be cleaning machines each filtering about 2 gallons of Severn River water per hour.

Their chances of survival this first year of life are greatly increased by your thoughtful care and simple actions to promote ideal growing conditions. The oyster cages allow the spat to develop during the growing season in the upper water column where food and oxygen are plentiful. You will also protect them from exposure to freezing air in the cold, dormant season; and keep them off the suffocating mud of the bottom year round.

Right now, your spat should be low maintenance dock mates. As the water temperature drops, the animals and plant growth that can foul the cages become less of a concern. Please keep your cages clean with bi-weekly "shaking" or "hosing" and keep them spread evenly with some "rattling" or "rolling." In a few weeks, we will remind you to lower your cages to their cold weather location: low in the water column.

Bob Whitcomb
Chair, Oyster Committee