

Canaveral National Seashore Guide to Seashells

Man's fascination with seashells has never seemed to dim through the years. Canaveral National Seashore is proof of this, with beach-combing and shell collecting as some of its most popular and rewarding activities.

By no means does this pamphlet attempt to cover all the different types of seashells found along Canaveral's shores, but sixteen of the most common are mentioned.

Common Oyster

The common oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) is greatly variable in shape, with massive rough and unequal shells. Its lower valve is usually cemented to any hard object available. Young oysters can smother in mud, so fishermen often throw back shells for them to attach to.



Pen Shell



Pen shells average 6" in length and live in soft, sandy mud with their narrow tips downward. A small foot spins clumps of tough threads that keep it attached to buried stones and broken shells. Two varieties of pen shells are found in this area: saw-toothed (*Atrina serrata*) and rigid (*A. rigida*). The rigid is distinguished by a horny texture with 15 rows of erect, prickly spines; the saw-toothed has small scales and over 30 ribs.

Coquina Clam

This tiny 1/2" bivalve is probably the most abundant shell found along Florida's beaches. The coquina (*Donax varabilis*) comes in many colors and patterns, both solid and plaid. Washed and boiled they make an excellent chowder.

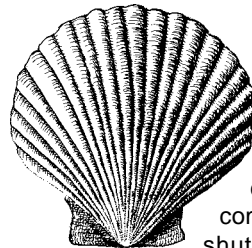
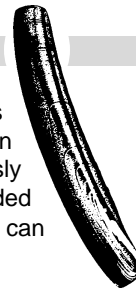


Lightning Whelk

What makes the lightning whelk (*Busycon contrarium*) different from other whelks is its "left-handedness", meaning the shell opens to the left rather than to the right. Specimens of this species may reach 16" in length, with 5 or 6 whorls and small triangular knobs at its shoulders.

Razor Clam

The large jackknife or razor clam (*Ensis directus*) is about six times longer than it is wide. A live clam can burrow deeply and hold on tenaciously with its muscular foot. The fully extended foot is nearly as long as the shell, and can be used for swimming as well.

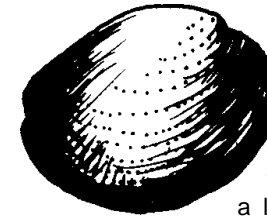
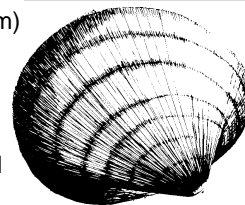


Calico Scallop

The calico (*Aequipecten gibbus*) belongs to a large and diverse group of bivalves, the scallops. They come in many colors - some collectors have a hundred calicos, all with different color combinations. By opening and shutting its valves, the scallop creates strong jets of water that are used as a means of propulsion.

Great Heart Cockle

(*Dinocardium robustum*) is very common in Florida. It is the largest of the cockle group, measuring 3-5", and is heart shaped with serrate or scalloped margins.

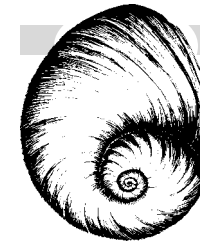
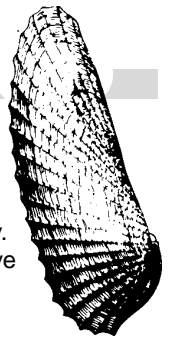


Jingle Shell

The dissimilar valves of the jingle shell (*Anomia simplex*) comes in variety of translucent solid colors. The upper valve is variably shaped, and the lower valve is flat and fragile, with a large hole through which threads pass to attach the live animal to rocks. The shell gets its name from the "jingle" the valves make when shaken.

Angel Wing

A favorite of collectors, this fragile, pure white shell is aptly named. Angel wings (*Cyrtopleura costata*) are found mostly in colonies, buried in up to 3 feet of mud or clay. They are abundant in muddy mangrove areas along the Florida coast.

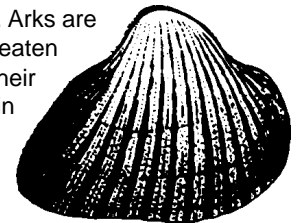


Moon Shell

The carnivorous moon snail (*Polinices duplicatus*) may consume 3 or 4 small clams a day. It is easily identified by the solid 2" shell with its 4 or 5 whorls and compressed upper portions.

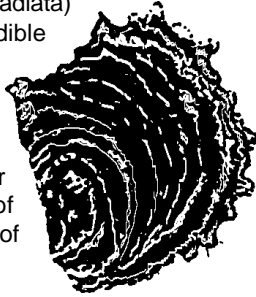
Incongruous Ark

The incongruous ark (*Anadara brasiliiana*) is about as long as it is high, with 26 to 28 beaded ribs. The left valve overlaps the right toward the posterior end of the shell. Arks are edible but are not usually eaten in the U.S. because of their bitter taste, and because in some species the blood's hemoglobin makes the flesh a red color.



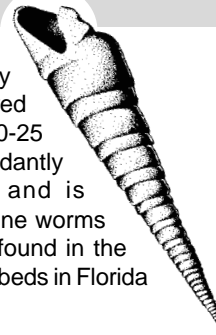
Pearl Oyster

The pearl oyster (*Pinctada radiata*) is only remotely related to edible oysters. It has a flat shell with scaly concentric projections, and lives mostly on rocks and sea fans. The pearl oyster can produce layers of nacre to cover small irritants, like a grain of sand, producing the only gem of animal origin...a pearl.



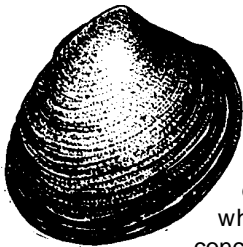
Atlantic Auger

The Atlantic auger (*Terebra dislocata*) is easily distinguished by its long tapered shell, with 15 whorls and 20-25 ribs per whorl. It's found abundantly on sand bars in Florida and is carnivorous, feeding on marine worms and young clams. It is also found in the Pleistocene time period fossil beds in Florida and Bermuda.



Southern Quahog Clam

The southern quahog (*Mercenaria campechiensis*), like its close relative the northern quahog, is often used commercially - in chowders, on the half shell, etc. It is distinguished by a large, dingy white shell with numerous concentric lines of growth.



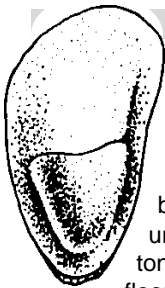
Disk Shell

Frequently washed ashore after storms, the disk shell (*Dosinia discus*) is usually found just offshore in moderately shallow water. It is a trim and neat shell, about 3" in diameter, circular, and glossy off-white in color, with numerous and crowded concentric lines.



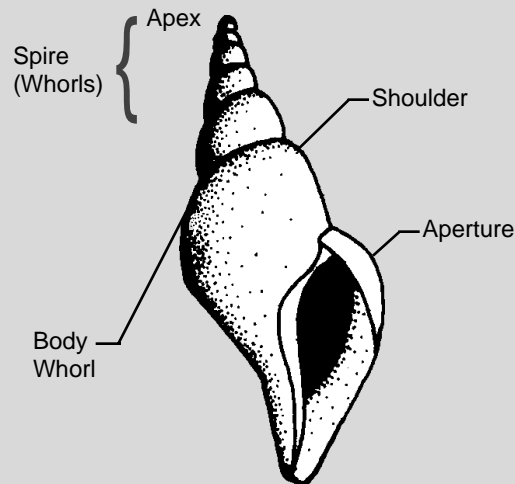
Slipper Shell

Slipper shells (*Crepidula fornicata*) are easily identified by a horizontal plate partially dividing its cavity, giving the shell a "slipper" look. These small 1 1/2" shells are among the first collected by children for playthings. Commercially, under the name "quarterdecks", many tons of these are scattered over the sea floor for embryo oysters to settle on.

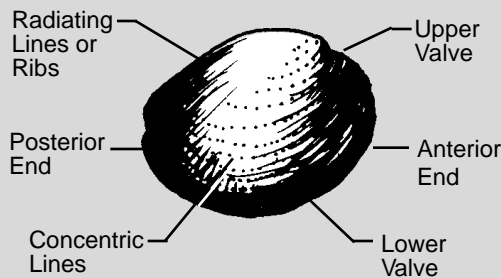


Terminology of Univalve and Bivalve Shells

UNIVALVE



BIVALVE



Guide to Seashells

