

# Wild Side

## *Siliqua patula* The Pacific razor clam

By LYNETTE RAE McADAMS

Though many will say that crab is king, when it comes to the most popular shellfish on our coastline, the Pacific razor clam is a definite contender.

Found primarily along the sandy, surf-pounded beaches of the open coast, this bivalve mollusk thrives on shores from California to Alaska and is highly prized in both the commercial and sport fisheries. Locally, these long, slender clams can grow between 6 and 7 inches in length (though most average between

4 and 5 inches), and have a life expectancy of about 5 years. In the colder waters of Alaska, however, they top 11 inches and live three times as long.

Inhabiting the inter-tidal and sub-tidal zones, Pacific razor clams begin their lives as free-floating larvae in a sea of chance. When they are somewhere between 5 and 16 weeks old, they've grown enough to begin to form a shell, at which point, they sink to the ocean floor and start their lifelong occupation: digging. Moving only vertically, using a piston-like motion,



Photo by Lynette Rae McAdams

These Pacific razor clams have been dug up from the beach and await a chef's touch.

mature razors can dig up to one foot per minute, and are quick to elude their captors, which include Dungeness crabs, shorebirds, and of course, hungry humans.

In Latin, "siliqua" means "pod," and "patula" means "open," so in the language of science, this creature is named for "resembling an open pod." More commonly though, the Pacific razor clam is so-called because

of its very sharp shell, which, when broken or mishandled by a digger, can cut deeply.

Juvenile razors are dark brown in color, then mature to a yellowish-brown or olive green, eventually turning brown again in later years. Beautifully banded in concentric swirls — like the rings on the trunk of a tree — their shells are thin and delicate, and on the inside, glisten to an almost translucent white, with streaks of deep purple. (Ask anyone with a taste for them, though, and they'll tell you the truth: A razor clam's best look is always on a plate — lightly breaded and fried to perfection.)

Recreational harvesting for razor clams is allowed in both Oregon and Washington, though regulations vary. Visit [dfw.state.or.us](http://dfw.state.or.us) or [wdfw.wa.gov](http://wdfw.wa.gov) to learn more.

## word nerd

By RYAN HUME

### Cheer [chir]

*noun, intransitive and transitive verb*

1. a celebratory shout of encouragement or praise; applause, or the act of doing so
2. a short, often repetitive chant or song devised by fans or a cheerleading squad to encourage a sports team
3. festive food and drink
4. a light feeling, mood or attitude; happiness or gladness
5. *archaic*: a facial expression
6. *obsolete*: face
7. *cheers*: pl., to raise a glass in appreciation

**Origin:**

Before 1200 as *chere*, meaning "face, or an expression or mood shown on the face." The term came to mean "gladness" before 1393. Borrowed outright from the Old French, *chere*, "face," from the Late Latin *cara* meaning the same thing, which arrives from the Greek, *kárā*, meaning "head." **Cheers** is first noted in 1919 having derived from the earlier definition, "a shout of encouragement" around 1720.

"Oh, let us hope that our sands have run  
With Wisdom's precious grains!  
Oh, may we find that our hands have done  
Some work of glorious pains!  
Then a welcome and cheer to the merry  
New Year,  
While the holly gleams above us;  
With a pardon for the foes who hate,  
And a prayer for those who love us."  
— Eliza Cook, "Song for the New Year," *Poems ... A New Edition, Etc.* London: Routledge, Warne, & Routledge, 1864. P. 145

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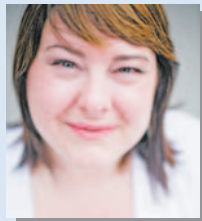
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