

## MOUthing OFF

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### Island Creek Oysters Expands, Explains How to Shuck 'Em Yourself

BY JUSTINE STERLING | POSTED MARCH 8, 2013 AT 1:30PM EST



Courtesy of Island Creek

The phenomenal team behind Island Creek Oysters in Duxbury, Massachusetts, and Boston's Island Creek Oyster Bar is two months into the construction of a new, rustic, seafood restaurant called Row 34. "Island Creek Oyster Bar was inspired by the majesty of Duxbury Bay," says partner Garrett Harker. "Row 34 is a workingman's expression of the oyster farm." The new spot, due to open this fall, will feature exposed brick and simple dishes like garlicky mussels. Its name comes from a row in the oyster farm where founder Skip Bennett first experimented with a new oyster-growing technique. Rather than grow these mollusks on the bottom of the bay, Bennett tried stacking them on suspended racks.

Amazingly, the method now produces oysters with a remarkably different flavor profile from those in the next row over. While both styles have a bright salinity, the Row 34 oysters have an umami-packed nuttiness that differs from the signature Duxbury oysters' intense, vegetal flavor. Bennett hypothesizes that the change in elevation allows the oysters to eat different plankton, and has already begun building more racks to keep up with customer demand for the new style. Though oyster-grower high jinks sounds like a trend in the making—Bennett wants to test bagged tumble oysters, which develop firmer muscles from rolling with the tide—the team [sells their classic Duxbury oysters online](#) and believes that the next big thing is shucking at home.

"It's a life skill that everyone should have, like opening a bottle of wine, starting a fire or learning how to drive a stick shift," Bennett says. Here, the Island Creek team's six tips for the best at-home oyster eating experience.

## How to Shuck an Oyster

**1. Get to know your oysters before buying them.** “It’s always a really good idea to ask for the shellfish tag to learn about exactly where those oysters are coming from and when they came out of the water,” says ICO president Shore Gregory. “I think that one of the great things about oysters is that they’re an expression of place.”

**2. Look at and listen to your oysters.** “When you buy the oysters they should be closed shut,” says Bennett. “If you tap them together they should sound like a rock rather than hollow.”

**3. Lean in closer.** “When you get oysters home and open them, oysters should always smell like the ocean and nothing other than that,” says Gregory.

**4. Have the right tools.** All you need is a glove or a kitchen towel, an oyster shucking knife and an oyster. “There’s a perception that it requires a lot of muscle, but with a good oyster that has a sturdy shell, and the right knife, it’s really an easy thing to do,” says Gregory.

**5. Make sure they’re juicy.** “When you open the oyster it should be full of liquor,” Bennett says.

**6. Keep the accoutrements to a minimum.** “Less is more,” says chef Jeremy Sewall. “Lemon and a basic mignonette always help the oyster shine.”