



VERTICAL OYSTER GARDEN

Installation & Gardener Guide

Vertical Oyster Gardens (VOGs) Can Improve Water Quality!



If you live on a waterway where some oysters are already present and would like to help improve water quality and clarity by increasing oyster habitat then you might want to install several Vertical Oyster Gardens (VOGs) under your dock. You can attend a local VOG workshop and build your own, or you can pick up pre-made VOGs at the West Palm Beach Fishing Club. Please call before stopping by (561)832-6780. Hang some VOGs and start your journey of oyster restoration!

Why VOGs and Not Other Methods of Restoration?

There are many types of oyster restoration techniques including placing cured shells in wire cages, mesh bags or simply piling up large quantities of shell to build oyster reefs. If the shell is being placed on the bottom, then a permit is required from an authorized governmental agency (FDEP, SFWMD, Army Corps of Engineers, etc.). These restoration techniques are utilized with success by large organizations, but they require significant planning and approval. Because Vertical Oyster Gardens are suspended in the water column (not laying on the bottom) they do not require a permit, only the permission of the dock owner. With thousands of privately owned docks in Palm Beach County the potential to increase oyster habitat using VOGs is significant. Because they are suspended, VOGs are also less impacted by sedimentation, a serious problem in Palm Beach County waterways.

Determine if your Dock is Suitable for VOGs



For a VOG to be successful some oysters should already be present. The existing oysters are the ones that are most likely to 'seed' your VOGs. If you already have some oysters on your seawall, dock pilings or other structures like ladders then your location is ideal to receive a VOG. Not all docks are suitable for VOGs, especially those in close proximity to inlets where salinity levels are too high, or where the water remains mostly fresh. Again, if you already see some oysters then you should have a suitable location for VOGs.

How to install VOGs



VOGs should be installed in coastal waterways and hung underneath a dock or pier. The VOGs must be hung in brackish water in the intertidal zone (between the tidal ranges). Use existing oysters as a reference. Suspending the VOG at the same elevation where oysters are already present is critical to successfully recruiting new oyster growth.

Pro Tip: It is best to install your VOGs during a low tide so you can accurately adjust the shells at the same elevation as the existing oysters on your dock, seawall, or other nearby structures like ladders.

1. Drill or Nail

Identify a few spots underneath your dock or pier (wood cross beams are often best) to suspend your VOGs. Use stainless steel screws, nails or hooks (stainless steel is preferred to prevent rust). Leave the screw or nail sticking out at least 1 inch to hang the VOG from.

2. Attach your VOG to the rope



Using a knot of your choice attach a length of 3/16" or 3/8" rope to the loop at the top your VOG. Standard clothesline available at most hardware stores works fine, parachute cord is even better and more durable.



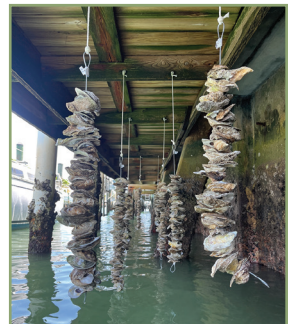
Pro Tip: Be sure to give yourself enough rope to work with allowing you to adjust the VOG higher or lower. The length of line you will need depends on how high the attachment point is in relation to the existing oysters.

3. Measure the Distance to the Intertidal Zone & Attach your VOG

Oysters naturally grow in the range between low and high tide (intertidal zone). Lower your VOG with the attached rope to the location where other oyster growth can be seen. Once you have identified the proper position tie off the rope to your screw or nail. The VOG should now be hanging in the intertidal zone!

4. Hang Multiple VOGs

If you are hanging more than a single VOG from your dock, repeat steps 1-3 for each VOG. Install the VOGs at least 12 inches (1 ft) apart from each other. This will leave space for the oysters to grow on the VOGs over time without crowding each other.



5. Help us Monitor the VOGs

Each VOG is tagged with a number and weighed prior to being deployed. This information, along with the address associated with the VOGs are noted on a master spread sheet. This helps us monitor the progress of the VOG program and gives us important data that will be useful to resource managers.



More Pro Tips:

- 1. You can pre-measure and pre-tie the length of rope on the VOG before hanging it on the screw or nail.*
- 2. Wear gloves, waders and/or heavy-duty wading shoes to prevent getting cut by existing oysters*
- 3. If the water under your dock is shallow with a firm bottom, you can walk under the dock at low tide and use a ladder to install your VOGs. However, most locations will require the use of a small boat, paddleboard or kayak.*

Frequently Asked Questions:

Where do the oyster shells come from?

The cured shells we are using for VOG restoration come from local restaurant partners. The Breaker's Resort in Palm Beach and Cod & Capers in NPB are our primary partners supplying shells. We anticipate this recycling program will expand to other restaurant partners in the future. The shells we are using for locally based environmental restoration were previously being sent to the landfill.

Can I eat the oysters?

No! Oysters in Palm Beach County waters are not suitable for human consumption. Do not eat the oysters that grow on the VOGs. Oysters that are harvested for eating are grown in waters that are monitored for water quality and bacteria/viruses. Remember, oysters are filtering out excessive sediments, nutrients, pollutants and bacteria out of the water. We are using VOGs to increase oyster habitat and improve water quality & clarity.

Is it okay if My VOG is out of the water on low tide?

Because they grow in the intertidal zone oysters often become exposed on low tides. This is normal. Try to position your VOG so that at least the bottom third of the VOG remains in the water on normal tides. You can expect the entire VOG to be exposed on extreme low tides.

What else is growing on my VOG?

In addition to oysters, you may see barnacles, sponges, invertebrates, and other creatures on your VOG. This is normal. VOGs increase biodiversity in the waters near you and improve water quality. Each VOG will become its own mini-ecosystem!

Can I put my VOG in freshwater?

No, oysters need brackish water to live. They require an average salinity of 8 ppt to 20 ppt. This means some oysters can live in tidal coastal rivers, where the saltwater

increases the salinity, but parts of the river that are mostly freshwater are not likely to support oyster growth. Freshwater ponds and lakes will not work either.

Can my Business have VOGs?

Yes, if you have a business on the water and want to grow VOGs reach out to us. We would love for your business to help support coastal oyster habitat restoration!

How Long will it take before I see Growth on My VOG?

It will take some time to see growth on your VOG. Oysters grow slowly and start off very small. It will be at least six months to one year before oysters can be identified. While you are waiting, continue to check on your VOGs! If growth does not occur after this time, it may be necessary to adjust the elevation of the VOGs, or in some instances relocate them.

Contacts for additional questions?

If you have additional questions or would like to receive pre-assembled VOGs reach out to the Palm Beach County Fishing Foundation at (561)832-6780 or email ttwyford@westpalmbeachfishingclub.org



Related Sources for Additional Information:

<https://tampabaywatch.org/our-programs/restoration/oyster-reefs/vertical-oyster-gardens/>

<https://www.gulfshellfish.org/vog-citizen-science-program>

<https://blogs.ifas.ufl.edu/pascoco/2025/04/16/vertical-oyster-gardens/>



The Palm Beach County Fishing Foundation is the charitable affiliate of the venerable West Palm Beach Fishing Club.

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