

BROWNE TRADING COMPANY

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

Maine Belon Oysters

(*Ostrea edulis*)

**WILD CAUGHT &
FARM RAISED**



Catch Region

Rivers and Islands on the Maine Coast,
Harvested inshore from Damariscotta to Isle Au Haut

Seasonality

September - June

Catch Method

Hand Harvested,
Often by Divers

Flavor Profile:

Intense & Minerally

Texture Profile:

Delicate & Creamy

Substitute:

- Eastern Oysters
- Pacific Oysters

Known more accurately as "The European Flat Oyster" (only true "Belons" come from the Belon River estuary in Brittany, France) these large oysters were transplanted to Maine decades ago. While local legend has it that they came from Europe in the bilge of ships and took root here long before we were a country, in truth they were deliberate transplants by scientists to the Boothbay Region in the 1950s. Here they were able to adapt to survive in Maine's cold waters and were able to reproduce and establish various beds throughout the Maine coast.

Now found both wild and in limited aquaculture, the "Belon" is hand-harvested in sub tidal coves and inlets where our Maine Rivers meet the sea. They flourish on harder, rocky bottoms in rivers such as the Damariscotta where they are actually harvested by divers – who have limited access once the rivers and inlets freeze over. Unlike their cousins, *Crassostrea virginica* (Eastern Oyster), these oysters are round in shape, with very flat shells and little pronounced cup, and much larger than the common Eastern oyster. Their resemblance to a small saucer has earned them the nickname "Plates". Because their abductor muscle is weaker than the American oyster, Belons are banded to help them remain closed and stored cup-down to retain their "liquor".

The creamy to light brown meat of these oysters is plump and substantial, with a big, pronounced flavor and metallic, "coppery" finish – distinct but far less briny than their Eastern Oyster cousins, with a "sweet to flinty" overtone. They are coveted when serviced on the half shell, but their full flavor also serves well when cooked for stews or soups (cooked, their meat will turn an ivory color). While some consider the European Oyster the finest eating in the world, others find it an acquired and unique taste because it is so dissimilar in flavor to the smaller Eastern and Pacific oyster species.

Wild Maine Belon Oysters are an allowable catch in Maine from mid September until mid June – but are premium in October through March with colder water temperatures. Select "farms" in Maine are authorized to harvest year-round, but are a true cottage industry with modest output. With so few harvested a year (estimated at no more than 5,000), the Maine "Belon" is among the rarest oyster available anywhere. Maine Belons vary in size and are measured across the shell: Medium (approx 4 inches) Larges (6 inches) to Jumbo (up to 8 inches size). Availability is Seasonal and Limited.

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