

The flavours of oysters

a guide to tasting



Loch Ryan

Nose The smell of a sandy shore
Body A nutty, woody oyster with lemon and cut grass undertones
Finish A clean earthy zinc finish
Texture Juicy and plump

Flavour 5 **Saltiness** 7 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 4

Maldon

Nose Brackish
Body Very subtle taste of driftwood
Finish A slow-burning strong metallic finish which builds to a crescendo
Texture Chewy and firm

Flavour 9 **Saltiness** 6 **Sweetness** 4 **Umami** 5

Milford Haven

Nose Salt & pepper
Body Subtle walnut shell and wood
Finish A long lasting clean copper finish with pleasant sweetness
Texture Firm and plump

Flavour 5 **Saltiness** 3 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 3

Portsmouth Harbour

Nose Iodine and saltwater
Body A smooth salted butter and cucumber taste
Finish A very clean, dry stainless steel finish
Texture Meaty with just enough bite

Flavour 5 **Saltiness** 9 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 8

West Mersea

Nose Very distinct briny nose
Body A complex flavour – salted butter then sweet cashew
Finish A lingering medium sweetness
Texture Plump, firm and meaty

Flavour 8 **Saltiness** 8 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 5



Colchester

Nose Strong salty nose
Body Woody and herby reminiscent of green sap
Finish Big earthy flavours of mushroom, leather and bronze
Texture Firm and meaty

Flavour 9 **Saltiness** 3 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 8

English Channel

Nose Echoes of sea spray
Body An intricate mix of walnut and driftwood with pear
Finish Medium sweetness followed by a steel finish which departs quickly with no aftertaste
Texture Plump and silky

Flavour 7 **Saltiness** 7 **Sweetness** 4 **Umami** 5

Fal

Nose Iodine
Body A juicy body with flavours of melon, lettuce and cucumber
Finish A lingering light tin and copper finish
Texture Firm & silky

Flavour 4 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 5

Caledonian (Loch Creran)

Nose Floral; akin to samphire
Body Big fruity flavours of apples, pears and avocado
Finish Initially sweet but culminates with tangy, but pleasant, tin
Texture Plump and silky

Flavour 8 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 8 **Umami** 5

Camel

Nose Seaweed and rockpools
Body Cucumber and lettuce with touch of lemon juice
Finish Sharp metallic zing in the midst of soothing sweetness
Texture Smooth and silky

Flavour 7 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 7 **Umami** 8

Colchester

Nose The smell of the open sea; iodine and ozone
Body A very clear flavour of salted butter
Finish A metallic finish, perhaps zinc, with potting soil and mushroom essence.
Texture Firm and creamy

Flavour 8 **Saltiness** 7 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 7

Colonsay

Nose Very slight sea breeze and geranium
Body Woody and nutty; avocado and pecan
Finish Strong white sugar finish
Texture Meaty

Flavour 7 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 7 **Umami** 5

Fal

Nose Very delicate saltwater
Body A manifest nutty taste
Finish A neat & tidy burst of sweetness that quickly recedes
Texture Plump, meaty and creamy.

Flavour 7 **Saltiness** 3 **Sweetness** 4 **Umami** 7

West Mersea

Nose A clean, fresh faint nose of rockpools (iodine & seaweed)
Body Well-balanced salt to sweet ratio. Delicate cucumber & lettuce flavour
Finish Long on the palate, earthy potting soil followed by a lingering tart metallic tang
Texture Silky, delicate, plump

Flavour 6 **Saltiness** 7 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 5

River Teign

Nose A very light freshwater nose
Body Fills the mouth with refreshing cucumber and lettuce flavours
Finish A sweet finish resembling watermelon
Texture Crisp and juicy

Flavour 4 **Saltiness** 3 **Sweetness** 7 **Umami** 5

Bigbury Bay

Nose A neutral nose but edging towards brackish
Body Quite distinct parsley and cut grass
Finish A short clean earthy copper finish
Texture Full and plump

Flavour 5 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 3



Introduction

Eating raw oysters is a uniquely invigorating experience. No other food conjures up a taste sensation as strongly as an oyster: the essence of the sea in edible form.

However, there are large differences among oysters with regard to taste, body and nose; the environmental conditions have a significant impact on flavours. Tastes can range from some salty to floral, some have fruity notes, mineral flavour or even hints of spice. Even oysters from the same estuary can vary in flavour depending upon exactly where they are grown.

'Rocks' and 'Flats'

There are two types of oysters widely consumed and available in the UK. The Pacific (or rock) oyster available all year round and the native (or flat) oyster available from September to April.



Why do oysters taste different?

Oysters feed by filtering water through their system – a single oyster can filter up to 10 litres of water per hour. The flavour of oysters is a function of the minerals, salinity, and the type of algae they eat in the water. Like wine, oysters gain much of their flavour from their terroir – or maybe their merroir even?!

Salt is often the primary flavour of oysters and this is because oysters take on the salinity of their environment, which can range from almost fresh to completely saline. A fully saline oyster will have a very briny taste while oysters with very low salinity, can taste flat, almost buttery.

Why do you need a guide?

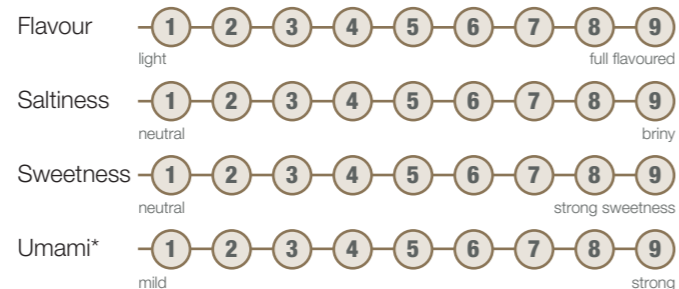
Different oysters suit different occasions and different people. If you haven't yet been wowed by oysters, you may well have been eating the wrong ones.

Maybe you dislike the brininess you get with West Mersea oysters and love sweet Duchy specials. Maybe you like bold, tangy oysters with zinc finishes. Or maybe that's not you at all. Maybe you did not know oysters could taste so different. This guide aims to demonstrate the huge range of flavours that oyster's exhibit. Rather than order a dozen or half-dozen of 'house' oysters why not try a mixture of varieties and taste for yourself.

How to 'taste' an oyster

Oyster tasting is a lot like wine tasting. We recommend that you chew your oyster a little bit, and aerate (take a little air in) to allow the flavours to cross the palate and develop fully.

Oyster guide



* Umami (the Japanese word meaning "the essence of deliciousness") is a fifth category of taste, separate from the familiar quartet of sweet, salty, sour, and bitter. Umami is perhaps best described as savoury. It's what makes chicken broth & soy sauce taste 'meaty'. Free amino acids, especially glutamate, are responsible for umami. When an oyster is called brothy, that's umami. A thin oyster can still have plenty of umami.

Frenchman's Creek (Helford)

Nose A delicate nose suggestive of samphire and geranium
Body Deep sweet nutty flavour. Hint of cashews and brown sugar
Finish A short finish with hints of forest floor and bark.
Texture Firm & plump
Flavour 7 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 6 **Umami** 5

Whitstable

Nose A definite aroma of a sea breeze. Soft scent of seaweed and rock pools
Body Mild taste of cut grass with hints of walnut shell and driftwood
Finish A crisp metallic smack. Distinct tin with salt.
Texture Meaty & Chewy
Flavour 6 **Saltiness** 6 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 5

River Exe

Nose Natural bouquet of freshly-caught crab and pepper
Body White sugar sweetness with suggestion of green sap and grass
Finish Initial clean mineral hit followed by a lingering light mushroom essence
Texture Very soft & silky
Flavour 6 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 7 **Umami** 7



Poole

Nose Light ozone
Body Deep complex flavours of pecan nut, avocado and cucumber
Finish Very short finish of musty pine. No aftertaste
Texture Creamy, soft cheese
Flavour 7 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 4 **Umami** 6

Lindisfarne

Nose Generally neutral but with a very faint sense of sea-breeze
Body Delicate butter with a distinct essence of melon coming through
Finish A long clean metallic finish
Texture Very silky
Flavour 5 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 5

Duchy Special (Helford)

Nose A light neutral nose
Body Succulent cashew nutty taste with a noticeable sweetness
Finish An intense quick finish of brown sugar and copper
Texture Firm, meaty and plump
Flavour 8 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 7 **Umami** 7

Jersey

Nose Fresh shoreline and seaweed
Body Crisp flavour of green wood and cucumber with a hint of lemon
Finish A slow builds up into a lingering tang of stainless steel
Texture Thin and delicate
Flavour 6 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 6

Maldon

Nose Light aroma of the sea
Body Rich flavour of walnut and avocado
Finish Tart tang of steel followed by a sweet aftertaste.
Texture Smooth and meaty
Flavour 6 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 6 **Umami** 7

Menai

Nose Mild but defined astringent aroma of sea-salt
Body Unmistakable taste of grapefruit, lemon, apples and herbs
Finish Two distinct flavours are apparent; copper and an earthy base reminiscent of a forest floor
Texture Silky and meaty
Flavour 6 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 6 **Umami** 7

Portland

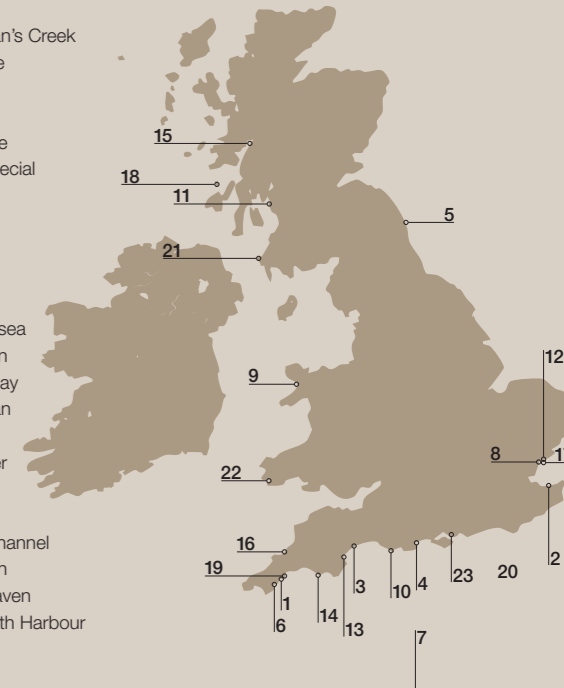
Nose Tangy brine
Body A nutty butter flavour with hints of cucumber
Finish A short syrupy finish with a noticeable earthiness
Texture Plump and meaty
Flavour 6 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 5

Cumbrae

Nose An established salty nose
Body A deep flavour of wood and nuts
Finish Slow coming but a durable copper hit
Texture Firm and meaty
Flavour 7 **Saltiness** 6 **Sweetness** 6 **Umami** 8

Where to find oysters

- 1 Frenchman's Creek
- 2 Whitstable
- 3 River Exe
- 4 Poole
- 5 Lindisfarne
- 6 Duchy Special
- 7 Jersey
- 8 Maldon
- 9 Menai
- 10 Fleet
- 11 Cumbrae
- 12 West Mersea
- 13 River Teign
- 14 Bigbury Bay
- 15 Caledonian
- 16 Camel
- 17 Colchester
- 18 Colonsay
- 19 Fal
- 20 English Channel
- 21 Loch Ryan
- 22 Milford Haven
- 23 Portsmouth Harbour



Unsure of how to choose, store, open your oyster?

Check out our "How to" videos on You Tube: www.youtube.com/ShellfishGB

Prefer your oysters cooked? Take a look at our cooked oyster recipe booklet on our website: www.shellfish.org.uk



The Shellfish Association of Great Britain (SAGB) is the industry's trade body based at Fishmongers' Hall, home to the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers, in the City of London. First founded as the Oyster Merchants' and Planters' Association in 1903, and renamed the Shellfish Association of Great Britain in 1969, the association has steadily extended its range of support to all shellfish from "harvest to sale" in over a century of support to the industry.

www.shellfish.org.uk
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