

A TIDAL KEEPSAKES FIELD GUIDE

The East Coast Beachcomber's Guide

Shell Identification, Rare Finds & Coastal Collecting



From New Jersey to the Florida Gulf

TIDALKEEPSAKES.COM



cool damp sand, and the promise that the sea has left something behind just for you.

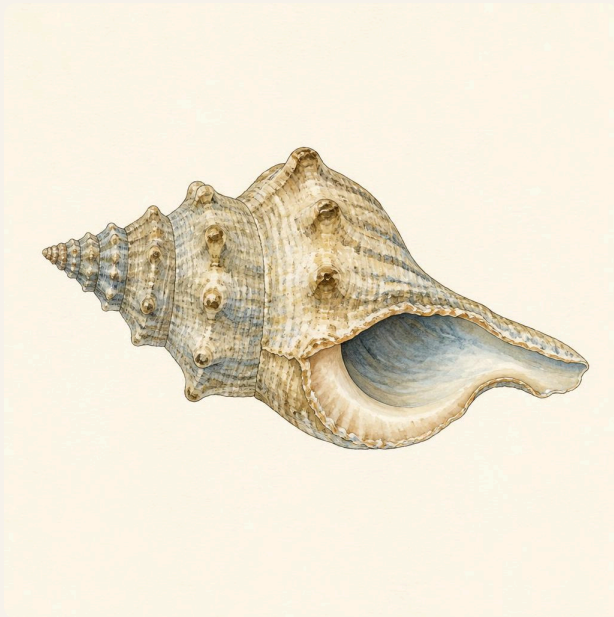
Your companion for the Atlantic seaboard — identification plates, regional maps, rare finds, a seasonal calendar, and field-tested tips for cleaning and displaying your treasures.

CONTENTS

Welcome to the Shoreline	02	Maryland	12
Anatomy of a Shell	03	North Carolina	13
Common Atlantic Specimens	04	South Carolina	14
The Knobbed Whelk	05	Florida	15
Whelks Compared	06	Seasonal Shelling Calendar	16
Olives & Moon Snails	07	Cleaning Your Finds	17
Scallops, Jingles & Coquinas	08	Displaying Your Collection	18
Holy Grails of Shelling	09	Your Field Journal	19
Regional Rarities	10	Continue the Adventure	20
New Jersey & Delaware	11		

Anatomy of a Shell

Learn the language of shells and identification becomes second nature. These are the features collectors read at a glance.



Watercolor study of a knobbed whelk — Tidal Keepsakes.

1. Apex

The pointed tip of the spire — the oldest part of the shell.

2. Spire

The coiled whorls above the body, rising to the apex.

3. Body Whorl

The largest, final whorl that holds the animal.

4. Aperture

The opening from which the living mollusk emerged.

5. Siphonal Canal

The narrow channel that protected the breathing siphon.

6. Columella

The central pillar around which the whorls coil.

7. Outer Lip

The flaring edge of the aperture, often thickened with age.

8. Knobs

Raised nodes along the shoulder — a whelk's signature.

9. Growth Lines

Fine ridges recording the shell's lifelong expansion.



DID YOU KNOW?

Most marine snail shells coil to the right (dextral). A left-coiling “sinistral” whelk, like the Lightning Whelk, is a prized exception and a fun field clue.

Common Atlantic Specimens



Left to right, shown at relative scale (4–7 in. across) · museum specimen photography.

Knobbed Whelk

Busycon carica

Heavy, spired shell with bold shoulder knobs; the New Jersey state shell.

Channeled Whelk

Busycotypus canaliculatus

Smoother whorls separated by a deep spiral channel; pear-shaped.

Lightning Whelk

Sinistrofulgur perversum

Left-handed opening with striking lightning-streak banding.

Lettered Olive

Americoliva sayana

Glossy cylinder etched with tent-like zigzag markings.

Atlantic Moon Snail

Neverita duplicata

Round, smooth globe with a tidy spiral and a broad foot.

Jingle Shell

Anomia simplex

Translucent, pearlized discs that chime like coins in the wind.



SEASON
Year-round



DIFFICULTY
Moderate



HABITAT
Open beach



RARITY
Uncommon

☆ **DID YOU KNOW?**

After winter storms, whole knobbed whelks wash ashore on barrier-island beaches — dawn after a nor'easter is the collector's golden hour.

RANGE · CAPE MAY TO THE OUTER BANKS



FEATURED SPECIES · THE STATE SHELL OF NEW JERSEY

The Knobbed Whelk

Busycon carica — the grand prize of a Mid-Atlantic walk. Up to nine inches long, with a row of blunt knobs crowning the shoulder and a flush of apricot inside the aperture.

Whelks Compared

Channeled or Lightning? Two look-alikes, told apart by a single, reliable clue: which way the opening faces.



Channeled Whelk (left) · Lightning Whelk (right) — shown at truescale.

Channeled Whelk

Busycotypus canalicularis

Aperture opens right. Smooth, pear-shaped whorls with a deep spiral groove (“channel”) at each suture. Tan to grey, 5-7 in.

Lightning Whelk

Sinistrofulgur perversum

Aperture opens left. The rare lefty — pale with violet-brown “lightning” streaks and shoulder knobs. A coveted find, 4-10 in.

★ DID YOU KNOW?

Hold the shell with the spire up and opening toward you: if the opening is on your left, it's a Lightning Whelk. Nearly every other Atlantic whelk opens to the right.

Olives & Moon Snails



Lettered Olive (left) · Atlantic Moon Snail (right).

Lettered Olive

Americoliva sayana · 2–2.5 in.

Glossy as polished stone, with fine zigzag “lettering.” The state shell of South Carolina. **Tip:** look along the swash line at low tide; their shine catches the morning sun.



SEASON
Spring–Fall



DIFFICULTY
Easy



HABITAT
Swash & flats



RARITY
Common



DID YOU KNOW?

Moon snails lay eggs in a “sand collar” — a rubbery, collar-shaped ring of sand and mucus that looks man-made but is entirely natural.

Scallops, Jingles & Coquinas

The shore's confetti — small bivalves the tide sorts into a painter's palette of cream, butter, coral, lavender and slate.



Atlantic Bay Scallops arranged by hue, with Coquinas and Jingle Shells.

01

SCALLOPS

Argopecten irradians. Ribbed fans in every shade; matched pairs make the loveliest keepsakes.

02

COQUINAS

Donax variabilis. Tiny, butterfly-bright clams; no two patterns alike.

03

JINGLE SHELLS

Anomia simplex. Translucent and pearly; they chime softly when strung.



DID YOU KNOW?

A “double” coquina — two valves still hinged and spread like wings — is a small lucky charm among collectors. Set them aside before the next wave takes them.

THE COLLECTOR'S DREAM

Holy Grails of East Coast Shelling

The shells that turn a casual walk into a lifelong pursuit — found once in a hundred low tides, and remembered forever.



Junonia

Scaphella junonia

Scotch Bonnet

Semicassis granulata

Lion's Paw

Nodipecten nodosus

Alphabet Cone

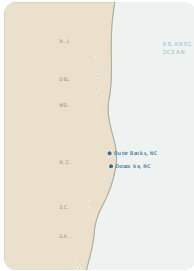
Conus spurius

Albino Fighting Conch

Strombus alatus

Regional Rarities

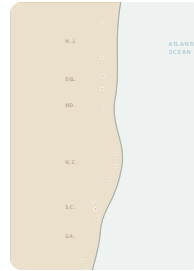
Where the prized shells appear — and the stretches of coast that give collectors the best odds.



Scotch Bonnet

Semicassis granulata

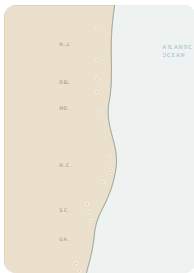
The state shell of North Carolina — a creamy, square-checked helmet shell.



Junonia

Scaphella junonia

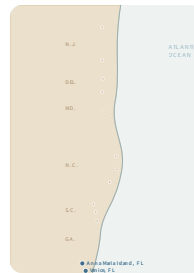
Deep-water rarity that storms occasionally gift to Gulf beaches.



Alphabet Cone

Conus spurius

Cream shell typed with orange “letters”; a Florida favorite.



Lion's Paw

Nodipecten nodosus

A heavy, knobbed scallop in vivid coral and orange.

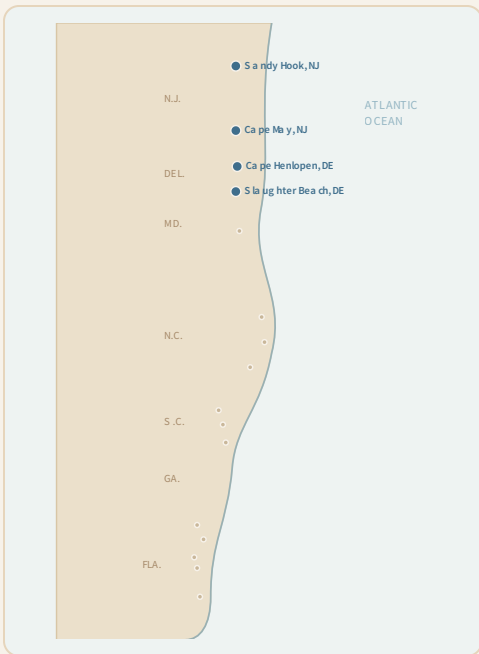


DID YOU KNOW?

Finding a Junonia on Sanibel once earned your photo in the local paper. Today it's still rare enough to make any sheller's whole year.

Cape May to the Bay

Diamonds and dawn light. The Mid-Atlantic's barrier beaches deliver whelks after every storm — and Cape May's famous quartz “diamonds” polished smooth by the surf.



WHERE TO WALK

Cape May

Higbee Beach

Sandy Hook

Cape Henlopen

Slaughter Beach

SIGNATURE FINDS

Cape May Diamonds

Clear quartz pebbles

Knobbed Whelk

Busycon carica

Channeled Whelk

Busycotypus canaliculatus

Atlantic Surf Clam

Spisula solidissima

Horseshoe Crab Molts

Limulus polyphemus

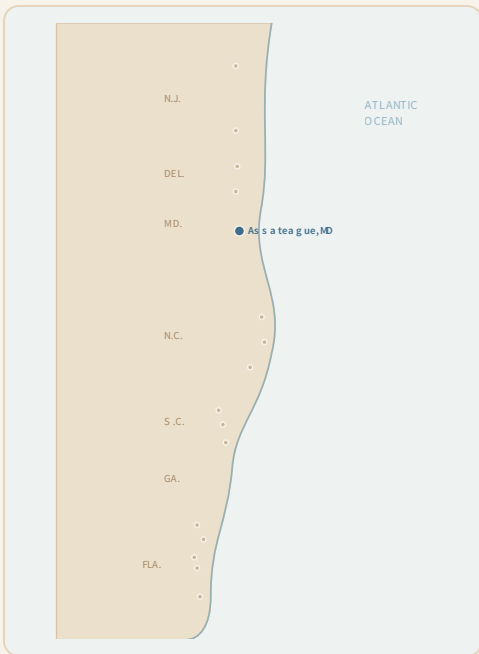


DID YOU KNOW?

Slaughter Beach, Delaware is a horseshoe-crab sanctuary. In late spring, walk at dawn to admire — and gently right — the ancient crabs stranded by the tide.

Wild Shores of Assateague

Where wild horses roam the dunes. Assateague's undeveloped strand is a fossil-hunter's beach — sharks' teeth, ancient bone and frosted sea glass mingle with the shells.



WHERE TO WALK

Assateague Island

Ocean City Inlet

Public Beach North

SIGNATURE FINDS

Fossil Shark Teeth

Carcharias & Otodus

Sea Glass

Frosted shards

Channeled Whelk

Busycotypus canaliculatus

Atlantic Jackknife

Ensis leei

Whelk Egg Cases

Busycon spp.

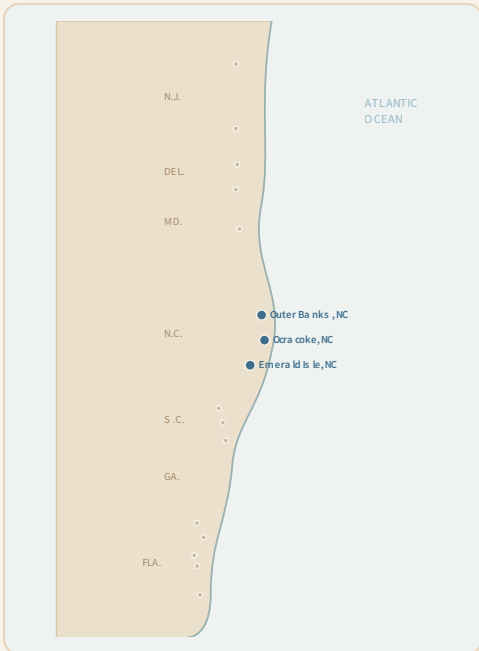


DID YOU KNOW?

Always give Assateague's wild horses at least 40 feet. They are truly wild — and the best shelling is at the wrack line, not near the herd.

The Outer Banks & Crystal Coast

Barrier islands strung like beads. From Cape Lookout's diagonal-checked lighthouse to remote Ocracoke, the OBX is the East Coast's premier hunting ground for the Scotch Bonnet.



WHERE TO WALK

Cape Lookout

Ocracoke Island

Emerald Isle

Cape Hatteras

SIGNATURE FINDS

Scotch Bonnet

Semicassis granulata

Helmet Shells

Cassis spp.

Whelks

Busycon spp.

Olive Shells

Americoliva sayana

Sand Dollars

Mellita quinquiesperforata

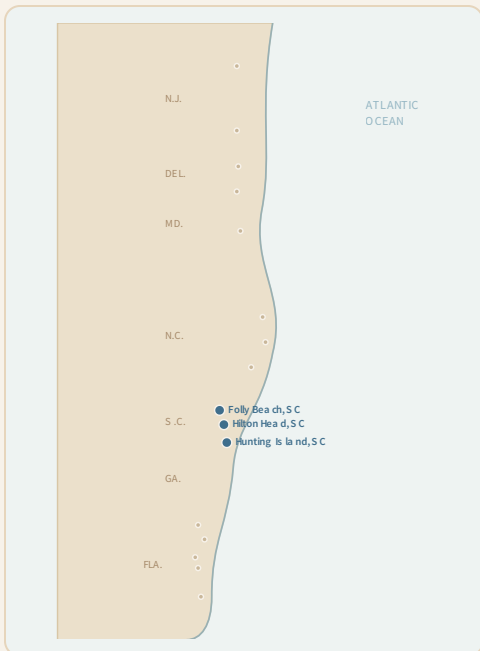


DID YOU KNOW?

Ocracoke is reachable only by ferry, which keeps its beaches gloriously uncrowded — and its Scotch Bonnets far more likely to still be waiting at sunrise.

Lowcountry & the Sea Islands

Sculptural driftwood and glossy olives. Hunting Island's “boneyard” beach is one of the most photogenic shores in America, and the Lowcountry hides whelks, conchs and sharks' teeth.



WHERE TO WALK

Folly Beach

Hilton Head

Hunting Island

Edisto Beach

SIGNATURE FINDS

Lettered Olive

Americoliva sayana

Fossil Shark Teeth

various

Knobbed Whelk

Busycon carica

Florida Fighting Conch

Strombus alatus

Angel Wings

Cyrtopleura costata

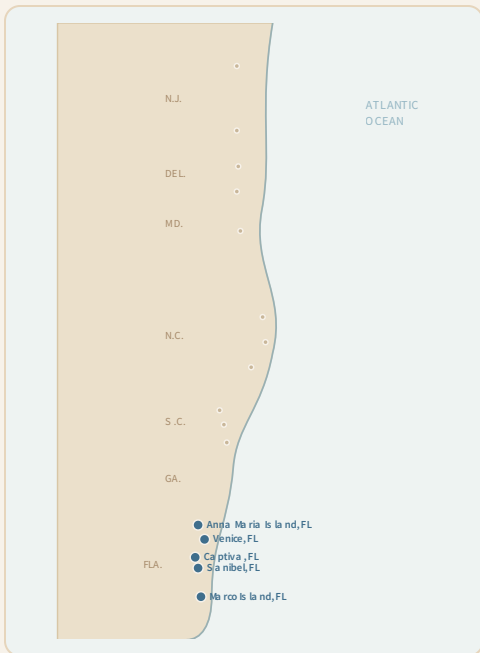


DID YOU KNOW?

The Lettered Olive is South Carolina's state shell — and Edisto Beach is famous for fossils. Sift the dark shell hash at low tide for sharks' teeth.

Sanibel & the Gulf Coast

The shelling capital of the country. Sanibel's east-west tilt rakes Gulf shells onto its beaches by the millions — bend low, do the famous “Sanibel Stoop,” and prepare to be amazed.



WHERE TO WALK

Sanibel

Captiva

Marco Island

Venice

Anna Maria Island

SIGNATURE FINDS

Junonia

Scaphella junonia

Lightning Whelk

Sinistrofulgur perversum

Lettered Olive

Americoliva sayana

Alphabet Cone

Conus spurius

Fossil Shark Teeth

Venice — “Shark Tooth Capital”



DID YOU KNOW?

Venice, Florida is the “Shark Tooth Capital of the World.” A long-handled “Florida snow shovel” sifter turns the offshore fossil beds into a treasure box.

Seasonal Shelling Calendar

The sea keeps its own calendar. Time your walks to the tide and the season, and the shore gives up its best.

Winter

PRIME SEASON

Dec – Feb

- Storm-tossed whole whelks & conchs
- Largest shells after nor'easters
- Fewest crowds at dawn

Spring

EGG CASES

Mar – May

- Whelk & moon-snail egg cases
- Horseshoe crab spawning (DE/NJ)
- Mild low tides, fresh wrack lines

Summer

SEA GLASS

Jun – Aug

- Frosted sea glass & coquinas
- Colorful scallops & jingles
- Best for families & tide pools

Fall

SHARK TEETH

Sep – Nov

- Hurricane-season storm finds
- Fossil shark teeth uncovered
- Quiet beaches, golden light



Golden rule: arrive at the **low tide nearest sunrise**, the morning after onshore winds or a storm. Walk the wrack line— that ribbon of seaweed and debris marks the high-tide harvest.

Cleaning Your Finds

A gentle ritual turns a sandy, salt-dulled shell into a keepsake worthy of display.



Soak, brush, rinse, dry — the only tools you need are patience and a soft brush.

01

BEFORE

Rinse off loose sand under cool water.

02

SOAK

Equal parts water & white vinegar, or mild soapy water, 1-2 hrs.

03

BRUSH

Work a soft toothbrush into ridges and the aperture.

04

RINSE

Flush thoroughly with clean water; repeat if gritty.

05

DRY & FINISH

Air-dry fully; a drop of mineral oil restores luster.



DID YOU KNOW?

To remove a chalky build-up gently, a brief vinegar soak works — but never on pearly or fragile shells, as acid eats calcium carbonate. When in doubt, soap and water only.

Want the printable version? Scan the QR on the back cover for our full *How to Clean Seashells* guide.

Displaying Your Collection



Memory jars, shadow boxes and a simple bowl bring the shore indoors.

Memory Jars

Layer a season's finds in a glass apothecary jar with a paper tag noting the beach and date.

Shadow Boxes

Mount specimens on linen in a deep frame — a museum cabinet for your wall.

Coastal Centerpieces

A white ceramic bowl of shells with hydrangeas is the easiest elegant table.

Shell Crafts & Wedding Keepsakes

Garlands, place cards and ring dishes — handmade favors guests keep.



FROM TIDAL KEEPSAKES

No finds of your own yet? Our hand-curated **Signature Box** and **Collector Box** arrive sorted, cleaned and ready to display — the perfect coastal gift. Visit tidalkeepsakes.com.

Your Field Journal

Record the walk while the salt is still in the air. Print this page and tuck it in your bag.

		DATE _____		BEACH / LOCATION _____		
TIDE _____		WEATHER _____		TIME _____		
<h3>Species Checklist</h3>						
<input type="checkbox"/> Knobbed Whelk	<input type="checkbox"/> Channeled Whelk	<input type="checkbox"/> Lightning Whelk	<input type="checkbox"/> Lettered Olive	<input type="checkbox"/> Atlantic Moon Snail	<input type="checkbox"/> Jingle Shell	<input type="checkbox"/> Scallop
<input type="checkbox"/> Coquina	<input type="checkbox"/> Scotch Bonnet	<input type="checkbox"/> Junonia	<input type="checkbox"/> Alphabet Cone	<input type="checkbox"/> Sea Glass	<input type="checkbox"/> Shark Tooth	<input type="checkbox"/> Sand Dollar
	<input type="checkbox"/> Whelk Egg Case	<input type="checkbox"/> Angel Wing				
SKETCH YOUR BEST FIND			NOTES			
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CONTINUE YOUR COASTAL ADVENTURE

The Tide Always Brings More

Explore our regional guides, identification resources and curated shell collections — and share your finds with us.



Shell Identification Guide



Best Beaches for Shelling



How to Clean Seashells



Coastal Decor Ideas



Beach Wedding Inspiration



Shell Craft Tutorials



Visit [TidalKeepsakes.com](https://tidalkeepsakes.com)

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