

How to Clean Seashells

A free printable guide from Tidal Keepsakes



Cleaning seashells is a multi-step process: remove salt, sanitize organic matter, and polish to restore natural luster.

1. Initial Rinse & Soak

Rinse shells in fresh water to remove loose sand and salt. For a basic clean, soak in warm water with a few drops of dish soap for several hours to loosen surface grime.

2. Deep Cleaning & Sanitizing

Bleach Bath: Soak in 1 part bleach to 3–4 parts water to kill bacteria and dissolve the periostracum (flaky outer skin).

Caution: no more than a few hours — bleach can make shells brittle or fade color. Avoid shiny shells like Cowries or Olives.

Boiling: For sturdy shells, boil 5–15 minutes to kill microbes and loosen internal tissue.

Vinegar / Eco-Friendly: Use a 50/50 water and white-vinegar mix, but don't soak long — acid erodes the shell's calcium carbonate.

3. Scrubbing & Detailing

Use an old toothbrush to scrub crevices. For barnacles or deep gunk, use a dental pick, metal wire brush, or tweezers to carefully chip away softened debris.

4. Polishing for Shine

Once fully dry (wait 24+ hours) shells often look dull. **Mineral Oil:** rub a little mineral or baby oil on with a soft cloth or Q-tip to restore the vibrant “wet” look. **Clear Coat:** for a permanent high-gloss finish, use clear acrylic spray or clear nail polish.

Cleaning Biological Specimens & Small Shells

Gentle care for egg cases, molts, fossils, glass & tiny shells


CLEANING BIOLOGICAL SPECIMENS OR SMALL SHELLS


★ A GUIDE TO CLEANING & PRESERVING YOUR BEACH TREASURES ★

 <p>HORSESHOE CRABS & MOLTS</p> <p>How to Clean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👉 Soak in fresh water to remove sand and salt. 👉 Use a soft brush to clean crevices. 👉 Air dry completely in a shady area. 	 <p>WHELK EGG CASES</p> <p>How to Clean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👉 Rinse gently in cool water. 👉 Use a soft brush to remove sand. 👉 Air dry away from direct sunlight. 	 <p>SKATE EGG CASES ("DEVIL PURSES")</p> <p>How to Clean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👉 Rinse in fresh water. 👉 Gently scrub with a soft brush. 👉 Dry completely to prevent odor. 	 <p>SUMMER "BLING" SEA GLASS</p> <p>How to Clean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👉 Soak in warm, soapy water. 👉 Rinse well and scrub if needed. 👉 Let dry completely.
 <p>FOSSILIZED SHARK TEETH</p> <p>How to Clean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👉 Rinse in fresh water. 👉 Use a soft brush to remove debris. 👉 Soak in mild soapy water if needed. 	 <p>CALICO SCALLOPS</p> <p>How to Clean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👉 Soak in cool water. 👉 Scrub gently with a soft brush. 👉 Rinse and air dry. 	 <p>OLIVE SHELLS</p> <p>How to Clean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👉 Soak in warm, soapy water. 👉 Rinse and scrub gently. 👉 Air dry completely. 	 <p>COQUINAS</p> <p>How to Clean:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👉 Soak in salt water or warm soapy water. 👉 Rinse thoroughly. 👉 Air dry.




 Always clean specimens gently and allow them to dry completely to preserve their natural beauty.
Take only pictures, leave only footprints, and keep our beaches beautiful!



Biological finds like egg cases and horseshoe-crab molts need a far gentler touch than stone-like shells — heavy bleach will make them disintegrate.

Biological "Soft" Finds

Horseshoe Crab Molts: Rinse gently; dip 30 sec in weak bleach (1:10) for odor. While wet, stuff with paper towels to hold shape, then air dry in shade — no direct sun.

Whelk & Skate Egg Cases: Soak 1 hr to rehydrate and flush sand. Use a soft paintbrush in the pockets. Once dry they get crispy — a light matte acrylic mist prevents crumbling.

Fossils & Glass

Shark Teeth: Soak 24 hr to leach salt; scrub root with toothbrush + soap. A drop of mineral oil restores "fossil black" luster.

Sea Glass: Warm soapy water + soft brush. Leave alone to keep the frosted look, or add a touch of oil for a wet, vibrant look in a jar.

Small & Shiny Shells

Olive Shells: Never bleach — it destroys the gloss. Soak in fresh water + dish soap, polish with a microfiber cloth.

Coquinas & Calico Scallops: Found in numbers — swish in warm soapy water to knock out sand. A 10-min 1:4 bleach soak makes Calico pinks/oranges pop; rinse immediately.

Item	Method	Warning
Horseshoe Molt	Fresh water + paper-towel stuffing	No high heat / sun
Egg Cases	Soak + soft brush	Very fragile when dry
Shark Teeth	Dish soap + mineral oil	Avoid acidic cleaners
Olive Shells	Soap & water ONLY	No bleach (kills the shine)

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