EQUIPMENT NEEDED

- Swim mask
- Snorkel
- Small mesh bag
- Divers-down flag (required by law)

Displayed on vessel, must be at least 20 inches by 24 inches with a stiffener to keep the flag unfurled. Should only be displayed while snorkelers are in the water. Display above the vessel’s highest point.

Tethered to diver, must be at least 12 inches by 12 inches, mandatory when using a mask and snorkel from the beach unless it is a marked swimming area.

You must make reasonable efforts to stay within 300 feet of a divers-down flag on open waters and within 100 feet of a flag within rivers, inlets, or navigation channels.

- Boat

Usually required to get to the best scalloping areas. In shallow water, it is possible to wade for scallops in the seagrass, or to collect them from a shallow-draft boat using a dip net or landing net, but these methods are not very productive. Most scallopers go by boat into water 4 to 10 feet deep where they anchor, put up the dive flag, and snorkel over the beds, collecting the scallops by hand.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

- Smaller than 1.5 to two inches in size is seen as a best scalloping technique. (Always consult the FWC website for legal harvest requirements, open seasons, and limits.)
- Harvesting is allowed from the Steinhatchee area of the Big Bend, and near the Crystal and Homosassa Rivers.
- Populations of bay scallops, once abundant in many other parts of the world, have decreased substantially. To help monitor and study scallops, an estimated 250,000 acres, flourish in expansive seagrass beds along Florida’s west coast as a result of a restoration program partly a result of a restoration program.

COLLECTING

Suturing the bivalve muscles of an open scallop requires more time and effort than removing the meat. Therefore, it is not practical to try to collect scallops by this method. The most efficient way to collect scallops is to use a dip net or landing net.

In Florida, commercial harvest of bay scallops is banned. In general, recreational scallopers between the ages of 16 and 65, with a Florida resident or non-resident hunting and fishing license, may quickly rebound in some southwest Florida locations when late-stage, hatchery-reared larvae are introduced. Future genetic studies are expected to increase scallop populations.

RECIPE: SIMPLY DELICIOUS SCALLOPS

Sauté 3 pounds Florida scallops in 2 tablespoons melted butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Stir until opaque, about 3 minutes. Overcooking makes the texture rubbery. Remove scallops from skillet and set aside.

Wipe out skillet, then melt 1/2 cup butter over medium-low heat, add 2 cloves garlic and salt and pepper to taste. Stir for 3 minutes and add scallops.

Serve immediately over prepared pasta of your choice, such as angel hair. Garnish with fresh dill and season with freshly ground pepper.

Recipe courtesy of Fresh from Florida Seafood. For more seafood recipes, visit http://www.fff-seafood.com.
SCALLOPING FLORIDA’S ADVENTURE COAST

Hernando County is in the southern range of healthy, harvestable bay scallop populations. Expansive seagrass beds, an estimated 250,000 acres, flourish in the coastal waters along this county, providing a habitat in which the scallops thrive. These plentiful seagrass beds, coupled with clear waters and shallow depths, make Hernando County an ideal place to snorkel for scallops during the open season.

Populations of bay scallops, once abundant throughout Florida waters, have fluctuated throughout the years, and their range has decreased substantially. To help monitor their populations and maintain a sustainable breeding population, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) annually reviews the status of the scallop population in the waters of the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

The boost in scallop populations may be partly a result of a restoration program started by researchers at the University of South Florida (USF), Florida Sea Grant, and FWC through its Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) testing the feasibility of aquaculture. Scallop populations have been introduced to seagrass beds in the coastal waters along this county, providing a suitable habitat for the scallops.

The boost in scallop populations may be partly a result of a restoration program started by researchers at the University of South Florida (USF), Florida Sea Grant, and FWC through its Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) testing the feasibility of aquaculture. Scallop populations have been introduced to seagrass beds in the coastal waters along this county, providing a suitable habitat for the scallops.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

In Florida, commercial harvest of bay scallops is banned. In general, recreational scallopers between the ages of 16 and 65 must have a current Florida saltwater fishing license to collect scallops. There are some exceptions listed in the FWC “Florida Saltwater Recreational Fishing Regulations,” which are available in bait shops, FWC offices, or on the FWC website (http://myfwc.com). All non-residents 16 and over are required to buy a license unless they are fishing (scalloping) from a for-hire vessel (guide, charter, party boat) that has a valid vessel license.

The season runs from approximately late June through late September. (Always consult the FWC website for dates of current season.) Harvesting is allowed from the west bank of the Mexico Beach Canal (in Bay County) to the Pasco-Hernando county line (near Aripeka). The bag limit is 2 gallons of whole scallops (in the shell), or 1 pint of scallop meat per person per day. In addition, no more than 10 gallons of whole scallops or 1/2 gallon of scallop meat may be possessed aboard any vessel at any time.

You may harvest scallops only by hand or with a landing net. Scallopers must remain in the legal scalloping area while in possession of scallops on the water, including the point where they return to land. See legal requirements about divers-down flags in equipment section.

COLLECTING

Scallops may be spotted on or near the bottom of seagrass beds, usually lying on their ventral shells. Often, they are easiest to find in borderline areas where the sand/mud bottom meets the edge of the grasses. Scallops have many neon-blue eyes and may try to swim away when they are not kept cold. Even if kept cold, scallops will usually die shortly after being placed on ice, especially if fresh water gets into their shells. Placing them on ice, however, makes them easier to open, because the muscle holding the shells together relaxes. A scallop, clam, or oyster knife, or even a teaspoon, can be used to open the shells and cut the white muscle free, discarding the shells and unwanted soft parts. Although most Floridians only eat the white scallop muscle, in many other parts of the world the entire animal is eaten. If you do plan to eat the entire scallop, it should be cooked thoroughly because many open harvest areas for scallops are not classified for harvest of other shellfish species.
Cleaning Your Shells

Be courteous of other scallopers and move your boat away from the scalloping areas first, then anchor. It’s no fun scalloping where others are cleaning their catch.

When done cleaning scallops, do not discard shells in rivers, channels, springs, or in the water at boat ramps or marinas. Shells could fill these areas, incurring costs to remove the shells and causing negative impacts on swimmers, wildlife, and navigation. Discard scallop shells out in open Gulf waters, or store shells in a bag and discard at home.