

DIVING EPICENTER

with Ben & Jen

The Crystal River Scalloping Season Guide

Dates, limits, gear, where to look, and how to clean your catch — everything you need for a day on the grass flats.

Think of it as an underwater Easter-egg hunt over the seagrass — simple, fun, and surprisingly addictive.

THE ESSENTIALS AT A GLANCE

Everything below is for the Levy / Citrus / Hernando zone, which covers Crystal River and Homosassa.

Open season	July 1 through September 24
Where	Grass flats between Crystal River and Homosassa — typically 3 to 6 feet of water
Per-person limit	2 gallons of whole scallops in the shell, OR 1 pint of scallop meat
Per-vessel limit	10 gallons whole in the shell, OR 1/2 gallon (4 pints) of meat — whole-boat maximum
Size limit	None — but earlier in the season the scallops run smaller
How to harvest	By hand or with a landing/dip net only
License	A Florida saltwater fishing license is required (ages 16–65), unless exempt. On a licensed charter, you're usually covered under the vessel's license
Dive flag	Legally required whenever anyone is in the water snorkeling — stay close to it and watch for boat traffic

Dates, zones, and limits are set annually by the Florida FWC and can change — and zones can close early if algae blooms make harvest unsafe. Always confirm the current rules on myfwc.com before you launch.

WHAT TO BRING

The essentials

- **Snorkel gear** — mask, snorkel, and fins. The water's shallow and usually clear — a basic snorkel set is all you need.
- **A mesh bag** — clip it to your waist or float so both hands stay free to keep hunting.
- **A dive flag** — legally required, and genuinely keeps you safe from boat traffic.
- **Your saltwater fishing license** — get it before you go; on a charter you're typically covered by the boat.
- **A cooler with plenty of ice** — get scallops on ice the moment you're done — it keeps the meat fresh AND pops the shells open, making cleaning far easier.

The nice-to-haves

- **A floating catch bin** — a floating cooler, or a mesh laundry basket with pool noodles zip-tied around the rim, gives you a place to stash your catch without swimming back to the boat every few minutes.
- **Polarized sunglasses** — for spotting scallops from the boat and cutting surface glare.
- **Sun and water** — reef-safe sunscreen (kinder to the seagrass), a hat or sun shirt, and plenty of drinking water. A thin wetsuit or sun suit if you chill easily over a long day.

HOW TO ACTUALLY FIND THEM

Scalloping is simple, but finding them consistently isn't random. Here's the rhythm:

1. **Anchor over a grass flat.** Head out to seagrass beds in 3–6 feet of water, drop anchor, and put your dive flag up before anyone gets in.
2. **Float and scan.** Swim slowly, face down, over the grass and along the sand edges. You're looking for the fan-shaped shell — or the giveaway: a row of bright blue eyes peeking out along the shell rim.

3. **Dive down and grab.** When you spot one, swim down and pick it up by hand. Try to grab from behind — scallops can “swim” away in a backward, clapping motion when they see your hand coming, and a startled one may clamp your finger (it doesn't hurt, but it's a surprise the first time).
4. **Work the patch.** Scallops group together. One good find usually means several more nearby — slow down and search the same patch thoroughly before moving on.
5. **Cover ground.** Once a patch is picked over, keep those fins moving. The key to filling a limit is covering as much grass as possible while searching carefully.

Start close to the boat.

Get comfortable with your mask, fins, snorkel, and mesh bag in the water right next to the boat before swimming far from the dive flag. And always keep track of where that flag is — it's both the law and the thing keeping boat traffic away from you.

CLEANING YOUR CATCH

Cleaning is often more work than catching — but the payoff is worth it. The only part you eat is the small round white muscle; everything else gets discarded.

The easy way

Many people in Crystal River pay to have it done — cleaning services around town typically run about \$30 per 5-gallon bucket, which is a fair deal if you've had a big day and don't want to spend the evening shucking.

Doing it yourself

1. **Ice them first.** Scallops clamp shut when caught. A stint on ice relaxes them and pops the shells slightly open, which makes everything easier.
2. **Use a blunt tool.** A spoon, butter knife, or an oyster/scallop knife — never a sharp pocket knife. You're pushing toward your palm, and a sharp blade that slips will cut you.
3. **Open at the hinge.** Start at the side near the hinge, work the tool around, and pry the shell fully open.
4. **Free the muscle.** Cut the muscle loose from one shell, open the scallop fully, then use the blunt end of the tool to scrape the guts and membrane away from the muscle. That clean white muscle is all you keep.

Please don't dump shells in the river.

Piles of shells dumped in the Crystal or Homosassa River are bad for the water and frowned on locally. Use trash receptacles, or scatter them in deeper open water where they disperse safely.

QUICK SAFETY & GOOD-NEIGHBOR NOTES

- Fly the dive flag whenever swimmers are down, stay near it, and watch boat traffic — this is the single most important safety habit of the day.
- Take breaks, hydrate, and eat over a long day on the water — heat and sun sneak up on you.
- Reef-safe sunscreen helps protect the very seagrass the scallops live in.
- Only take what you'll use, stay within the limits, and confirm current FWC dates and any zone closures before every trip.

Season dates and zone rules change year to year and can close early. Always check myfwc.com (search “bay scallop”) for the current season before you go.

See you at the next spot.

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