

# BUYING OYSTER SEED – CONSIDERATIONS FOR GROWERS

July 2020



## PLOIDY – DIPLOID OR TRIPLOID?

Ploidy is the number of sets of chromosomes in a cell. Diploids have 2 sets (1 from Mom, 1 from Dad); triploids have 3 sets rendering them “spawnless”. Which one should you choose? Triploids are the most widely used on commercial farms in Virginia because they grow fast and are marketable all year round. Diploids are reproductive, and therefore aren’t marketable due to poor meat quality and yield in the summer months when oysters are spawning.

What you choose is really dependent on when you plan to market your oysters. Keep in mind – cultured diploids have better growth and survival compared to wild oysters. ***Consider growing both and marketing at different times of the year - but keep them separate.***

## STOCK – KNOW WHAT YOU ARE BUYING

A stock (a.k.a. strain, or line) is a group of oysters selectively bred for improved performance (such as growth or survival in the face of diseases such as MSX or Dermo) in a specific salinity range (low or moderate). Ask your seed provider what they offer. There are a variety of stocks available in Virginia, thanks to the breeding work conducted at VIMS’ Aquaculture Genetics & Breeding Technology Center (ABC).

**Make informed choices and record seed performance**

Hatcheries have the option to produce seed using selected stocks from VIMS and/or produce their own local stocks. VIMS stocks have unique names like “Deby”, “Lola”, or “Henry”. The hatcheries will name their crosses too - usually after the local waterbody.

So how do you know what to choose? The selected stocks generally have good performance overall, but it really depends on the conditions at your particular location. There’s no clear-cut answer, but there are a few good common sense suggestions: Ask around - what are other growers in your area using? Inform the seed seller of your location, salinity and ask for recommendations. ***Consider trying two strains & comparing their performance but keep them separate.***

## SIZE

There are a variety of sizes available for sale and not all sellers offer all sizes. The larger the seed, the more it costs. Small seed (1 mm – 6 mm) requires the use of a nursery system such as an upweller. Less experienced growers would be better off purchasing larger seed (~7 – 13 mm or 1/4 – 1/2 inch) perfecting the grow-out technique first, before adding a nursery component.

*Note - sieve size does not equal seed size (rule of thumb: stock in mesh 1 size smaller than the sieve size)*

## ORDERING

Seed is sold by the thousand. Orders should be placed in advance of the season (by Jan-Feb) and typically require a deposit. Triploids and/or disease resistant stocks are usually more expensive because there is a licensing fee charged to the hatcheries for use of the improved stocks. Don’t buy more seed than you have gear to maintain it as it grows!

## THINKING ABOUT BUYING FROM OUTSIDE VIRGINIA?

There are [seed import regulations](#) in order to protect the biosecurity of our local waters and oysters. There are diseases in other regions that we do not have or want in Virginia.