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How do you make a sea scallop grow? Simple, seed it

Sarasota County is partnering with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute to plant a future population of local sea scallops. Beginning in August, the county will work with waterfront property owners on a scallop seeding project that they hope will propagate the species, which is declining due to over-fishing and poor water quality.

“Sea scallops are important indicators of water quality,” says Sarasota County Environmental Specialist Rene Janneman. “That’s because they are so sensitive to environmental changes. If we can identify when scallops die, we can narrow down the environmental factors affecting their health.”

According to the institute, areas along southwest Florida — including Sarasota Bay — that once harbored dense scallop populations, now support few if any. To restore those numbers, Florida closed all state waters to commercial bay scallop fishing in 1994, and closed recreational scallop fishing south of the Suwannee River. The recreational harvest season was reduced to three months.

Sarasota County is now asking waterfront property owners with direct bay access for permission to place cages holding live young scallops under their docks and then monitor the scallops each month to track growth and survival rates.

Janneman notes that the lack of red tide over the past couple of years has allowed the local sea scallop population to recover, making environmental conditions favorable for a successful scallop seeding program.

To volunteer for the program or host a scallop site, contact the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 and ask for the scallop seeding project.