

## West Mersea

**Nose** A clean, fresh faint nose of rockpools (iodine & seaweed)  
**Body** Well-balanced salt to sweet ratio. Delicate cucumber & lettuce flavour  
**Finish** Long on the palate, earthy potting soil followed by a lingering tart metallic tang  
**Texture** Silky, delicate, plump

**Flavour** 6 **Saltiness** 7 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 5

## River Teign

**Nose** A very light freshwater nose  
**Body** Fills the mouth with refreshing cucumber and lettuce flavours  
**Finish** A sweet finish resembling watermelon  
**Texture** Crisp and juicy

**Flavour** 4 **Saltiness** 3 **Sweetness** 7 **Umami** 5

## Bigbury Bay

**Nose** A neutral nose but edging towards brackish  
**Body** Quite distinct parsley and cut grass  
**Finish** A short clean earthy copper finish  
**Texture** Full and plump

**Flavour** 5 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 3



## Caledonian (Loch Creran)

**Nose** Floral; akin to samphire  
**Body** Big fruity flavours of apples, pears and avocado  
**Finish** Initially sweet but culminates with tangy, but pleasant, tin  
**Texture** Plump and silky

**Flavour** 8 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 8 **Umami** 5

## Camel

**Nose** Seaweed and rockpools  
**Body** Cucumber and lettuce with touch of lemon juice  
**Finish** Sharp metallic zing in the midst of soothing sweetness  
**Texture** Smooth and silky

**Flavour** 7 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 7 **Umami** 8

## Colchester

**Nose** The smell of the open sea; iodine and ozone  
**Body** A very clear flavour of salted butter  
**Finish** A metallic finish, perhaps zinc, with potting soil and mushroom essence.  
**Texture** Firm and creamy

**Flavour** 8 **Saltiness** 7 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 7

## Colonsay

**Nose** Very slight sea breeze and geranium  
**Body** Woody and nutty; avocado and pecan  
**Finish** Strong white sugar finish  
**Texture** Meaty

**Flavour** 7 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 7 **Umami** 5

## Fal

**Nose** Very delicate saltwater  
**Body** A manifest nutty taste  
**Finish** A neat & tidy burst of sweetness that quickly recedes  
**Texture** Plump, meaty and creamy.

**Flavour** 7 **Saltiness** 3 **Sweetness** 4 **Umami** 7



## Colchester

**Nose** Strong salty nose  
**Body** Woody and herby reminiscent of green sap  
**Finish** Big earthy flavours of mushroom, leather and bronze  
**Texture** Firm and meaty

**Flavour** 9 **Saltiness** 3 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 8

## English Channel

**Nose** Echoes of sea spray  
**Body** An intricate mix of walnut and driftwood with pear  
**Finish** Medium sweetness followed by a steel finish which departs quickly with no aftertaste  
**Texture** Plump and silky

**Flavour** 7 **Saltiness** 7 **Sweetness** 4 **Umami** 5

## Fal

**Nose** Iodine  
**Body** A juicy body with flavours of melon, lettuce and cucumber  
**Finish** A lingering light tin and copper finish  
**Texture** Firm & silky

**Flavour** 4 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 5

## Loch Ryan

**Nose** The smell of a sandy shore  
**Body** A nutty, woody oyster with lemon and cut grass undertones  
**Finish** A clean earthy zinc finish  
**Texture** Juicy and plump

**Flavour** 5 **Saltiness** 7 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 4

## Maldon

**Nose** Brackish  
**Body** Very subtle taste of driftwood  
**Finish** A slow-burning strong metallic finish which builds to a crescendo  
**Texture** Chewy and firm

**Flavour** 9 **Saltiness** 6 **Sweetness** 4 **Umami** 5

## Milford Haven

**Nose** Salt & pepper  
**Body** Subtle walnut shell and wood  
**Finish** A long lasting clean copper finish with pleasant sweetness  
**Texture** Firm and plump

**Flavour** 5 **Saltiness** 3 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 3

## Portsmouth Harbour

**Nose** Iodine and saltwater  
**Body** A smooth salted butter and cucumber taste  
**Finish** A very clean, dry stainless steel finish  
**Texture** Meaty with just enough bite

**Flavour** 5 **Saltiness** 9 **Sweetness** 3 **Umami** 8

## West Mersea

**Nose** Very distinct briny nose  
**Body** A complex flavour – salted butter then sweet cashew  
**Finish** A lingering medium sweetness  
**Texture** Plump, firm and meaty

**Flavour** 8 **Saltiness** 8 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 5



Shellfish  
Association of Great Britain

# The flavours of oysters a guide to tasting



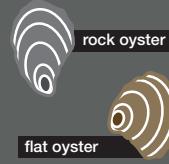
# Introduction

Eating raw oysters is a uniquely invigorating experience. No other food conjures up a taste sensation as strongly as an oyster: the essence of the sea in edible form.

However, there are large differences among oysters with regard to taste, body and nose; the environmental conditions have a significant impact on flavours. Tastes can range from some salty to floral, some have fruity notes, mineral flavour or even hints of spice. Even oysters from the same estuary can vary in flavour depending upon exactly where they are grown.

## 'Rocks' and 'Flats'

There are two types of oysters widely consumed and available in the UK. The Pacific (or rock) oyster available all year round and the native (or flat) oyster available from September to April.



## Why do oysters taste different?

Oysters feed by filtering water through their system – a single oyster can filter up to 10 litres of water per hour. The flavour of oysters is a function of the minerals, salinity, and the type of algae they eat in the water. Like wine, oysters gain much of their flavour from their terroir – or maybe their merroir even?!

Salt is often the primary flavour of oysters and this is because oysters take on the salinity of their environment, which can range from almost fresh to completely saline. A fully saline oyster will have a very briny taste while oysters with very low salinity, can taste flat, almost buttery.

## Why do you need a guide?

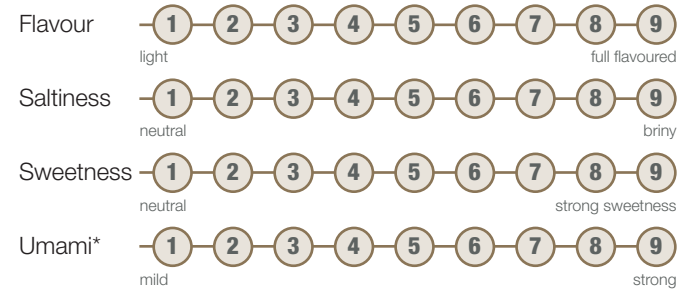
Different oysters suit different occasions and different people. If you haven't yet been wowed by oysters, you may well have been eating the wrong ones.

Maybe you dislike the brininess you get with West Mersea oysters and love sweet Duchy specials. Maybe you like bold, tangy oysters with zinc finishes. Or maybe that's not you at all. Maybe you did not know oysters could taste so different. This guide aims to demonstrate the huge range of flavours that oysters exhibit. Rather than order a dozen or half-dozen of 'house' oysters why not try a mixture of varieties and taste for yourself.

## How to 'taste' an oyster

Oyster tasting is a lot like wine tasting. We recommend that you chew your oyster a little bit, and aerate (take a little air in) to allow the flavours to cross the palate and develop fully.

# Oyster guide



\* Umami (the Japanese word meaning "the essence of deliciousness") is a fifth category of taste, separate from the familiar quartet of sweet, salty, sour, and bitter. Umami is perhaps best described as savoury. It's what makes chicken broth & soy sauce taste 'meaty'. Free amino acids, especially glutamate, are responsible for umami. When an oyster is called brothy, that's umami. A thin oyster can still have plenty of umami.

## Frenchman's Creek (Helford)

**Nose** A delicate nose suggestive of samphire and geranium  
**Body** Deep sweet nutty flavour. Hint of cashews and brown sugar  
**Finish** A short finish with hints of forest floor and bark.  
**Texture** Firm & plump  
**Flavour** 7 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 6 **Umami** 5

## Whitstable

**Nose** A definite aroma of a sea breeze. Soft scent of seaweed and rock pools  
**Body** Mild taste of cut grass with hints of walnut shell and driftwood  
**Finish** A crisp metallic smack. Distinct tin with salt.  
**Texture** Meaty & Chewy  
**Flavour** 6 **Saltiness** 6 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 5

## River Exe

**Nose** Natural bouquet of freshly-caught crab and pepper  
**Body** White sugar sweetness with suggestion of green sap and grass  
**Finish** Initial clean mineral hit followed by a lingering light mushroom essence  
**Texture** Very soft & silky  
**Flavour** 6 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 7 **Umami** 7



## Poole

**Nose** Light ozone  
**Body** Deep complex flavours of pecan nut, avocado and cucumber  
**Finish** Very short finish of musty pine. No aftertaste  
**Texture** Creamy, soft cheese  
**Flavour** 7 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 4 **Umami** 6

## Lindisfarne

**Nose** Generally neutral but with a very faint sense of sea-breeze  
**Body** Delicate butter with a distinct essence of melon coming through  
**Finish** A long clean metallic finish  
**Texture** Very silky  
**Flavour** 5 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 5

## Duchy Special (Helford)

**Nose** A light neutral nose  
**Body** Succulent cashew nutty taste with a noticeable sweetness  
**Finish** An intense quick finish of brown sugar and copper  
**Texture** Firm, meaty and plump  
**Flavour** 8 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 7 **Umami** 7

## Jersey

**Nose** Fresh shoreline and seaweed  
**Body** Crisp flavour of green wood and cucumber with a hint of lemon  
**Finish** A slow builds up into a lingering tang of stainless steel  
**Texture** Thin and delicate  
**Flavour** 6 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 6

## Maldon

**Nose** Light aroma of the sea  
**Body** Rich flavour of walnut and avocado  
**Finish** Tart tang of steel followed by a sweet aftertaste.  
**Texture** Smooth and meaty  
**Flavour** 6 **Saltiness** 5 **Sweetness** 6 **Umami** 7

## Menai

**Nose** Mild but defined astringent aroma of sea-salt  
**Body** Unmistakable taste of grapefruit, lemon, apples and herbs  
**Finish** Two distinct flavours are apparent; copper and an earthy base reminiscent of a forest floor  
**Texture** Silky and meaty  
**Flavour** 6 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 6 **Umami** 7

## Portland

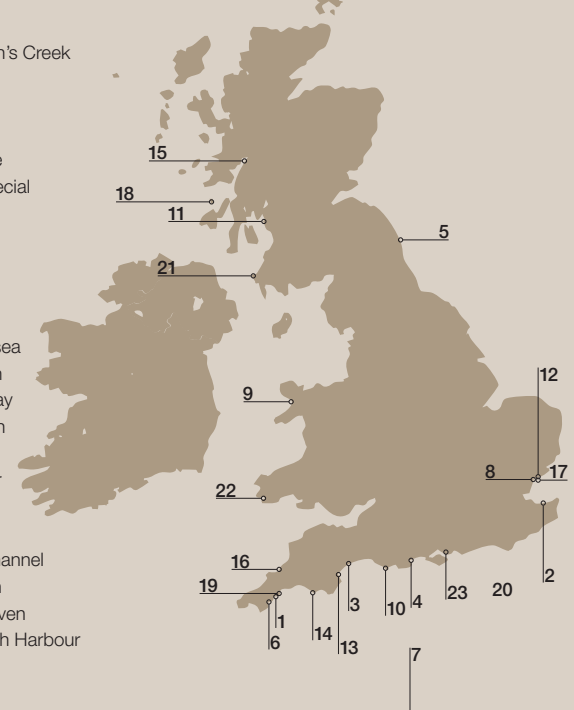
**Nose** Tangy brine  
**Body** A nutty butter flavour with hints of cucumber  
**Finish** A short syrupy finish with a noticeable earthiness  
**Texture** Plump and meaty  
**Flavour** 6 **Saltiness** 4 **Sweetness** 5 **Umami** 5

## Cumbrae

**Nose** An established salty nose  
**Body** A deep flavour of wood and nuts  
**Finish** Slow coming but a durable copper hit  
**Texture** Firm and meaty  
**Flavour** 7 **Saltiness** 6 **Sweetness** 6 **Umami** 8

# Where to find oysters

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## Unsure of how to choose, store, open your oyster?

Check out our "How to" videos on You Tube: [www.youtube.com/ShellfishGB](http://www.youtube.com/ShellfishGB)

**Prefer your oysters cooked?** Take a look at our cooked oyster recipe booklet on our website: [www.shellfish.org.uk](http://www.shellfish.org.uk)



Shellfish Association of Great Britain

The Shellfish Association of Great Britain (SAGB) is the industry's trade body based at Fishmongers' Hall, home to the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers, in the City of London. First founded as the Oyster Merchants' and Planters' Association in 1903, and renamed the Shellfish Association of Great Britain in 1969, the association has steadily extended its range of support to all shellfish from "harvest to sale" in over a century of support to the industry.

[www.shellfish.org.uk](http://www.shellfish.org.uk)

<http://twitter.com/sagb> | [www.youtube.com/shellfishGB](http://www.youtube.com/shellfishGB)