

Shipping and Storage Information for Oyster Ecommerce Websites

Kimberly Reuter, Chief Consultant & Founder, CSG Consulting

Purpose

Many customers are new to buying, shucking, and serving oysters. While they have enjoyed consuming oysters in restaurants and bars, there is a fear of mishandling or becoming ill by consuming spoiled seafood.

Providing customers with assurance the product will arrive safely for consumption and instructions on handling oysters are essential for building brand trust and loyalty.

Below are explanations and examples of the type of information that needs to be provided on the ecommerce website to build consumer confidence and repeat purchases. This information can be provided to the customer on a "Shipping and Storage" page on your website or an FAQ page.

Packaging and Shipping

The customer wants to know how and when their order will be shipped. In addition, consumers are becoming more aware of packaging's impact on the environment and recyclable packaging. Providing the customer with details on shipping and packaging will reduce inquiry emails/phone calls and help convert shoppers to buyers.

Packaging

If you are using unique, recyclable, or biodegradable packaging, let your consumer know. Customers are always looking for market differentiators and brands that align with their beliefs and practices (recycling, saving the earth, etc.) Describing and highlighting the type of packaging is especially important if it is part of your brand, e.g. only using biodegradable packaging because your farm focuses on earth-friendly solutions.

Example Copy

1. At (Business Name), we care about the environment, the Chesapeake Bay, and our oysters. We use only recyclable and biodegradable shipping material and provide various options for delivering our oysters
2. At (Business Name), we care about our customer satisfaction and providing the best tasting oyster available. We use the best quality packaging and insulation to ensure our oysters maintain a safe temperature throughout the shipping process.

Shipping Days and Shipping Options

The customer will have questions about shipping days, order cutoffs, and shipping options for safety, planning, and expected delivery. Providing your customer with information on the shipping options and order cutoffs can help convert sales and reduce contacts asking repeat questions.

Example Copy

1. Our oysters are shipped from our farm on the LOCATION OF FARM/LANDING. Due to our rural location, our working farm, and our dedication to providing the freshest oysters available, we ship our oysters on (LIST DAYS OF SHIPPING).
2. At BUSINESS NAME, we are passionate about oysters. We want your seafood to arrive at your door in peak condition. As such, we have meticulously tested our packaging and shipping. We offer our customers the best shipping price and speed based on continuous shipping tests designed to optimize quality. Our order cutoff and shipping times are provided below.

Order Cut Off & Shipping Times

- Orders placed Monday - Thursday by Noon EST will ship the same day.
- Orders placed Friday - Sunday by Noon EST will ship the following Monday.

You will receive an order confirmation and notification when the product is shipped with tracking information.

3. To keep our shipping cost low, we offer 2-day shipping, in addition to 1-day shipping, to all locations in the continental US. We provide extra insulation and chill-packs to ensure our oysters arrive chilled, fresh, and ready to slurp. Shipping cost will be calculated at checkout based on delivery location.
4. To ensure our oysters arrive in peak condition, we only ship using 1-day shipping to all locations in the continental US. Currently, we do not ship to Alaska, Hawaii, APO/FPO, or PO Boxes. Shipping cost will be calculated at checkout based on delivery location. (ALTERNATIVE COPY - We offer a flat rate shipping of \$.)
5. **Order Cut Off & Shipping Times**
Orders placed Monday - Wednesday by Noon EST will ship on Wednesday with arrival at your door on Friday.
Orders placed after Noon EST on Wednesday will be shipped the following week on Wednesday

Alternative Delivery Methods

Many oyster farms and seafood houses offer pick-up options at the farm and/or at specified regional locations. Pick-up is a cost-effective alternative to expensive shipping. In addition, interacting directly with the consumer drives customer loyalty.

Regional pick-ups are typically for online orders, though it is suggested you have some extra on hand to sell to walk-up customers.

Regional Pick-up

Regional pick-up operations are most successful when scheduled in advance at the same locations. As an example, 2nd Saturday of the Month at the Fredericksburg Farmer's Market. Additional location options include breweries, wineries, and music venues.

Example Copy

1. To keep our oysters readily available, we currently offer pick-up locations in Virginia. We not only provide pick-up for our customer convenience, we do it to meet our fellow oyster-lovers. Our pop-up pick-ups are once a month at the following locations.

LOCATION with ADDRESS – DATE or REPEAT DAY OF THE MONTH

2. We have partnered with NAME OF BUSINESS to bring our fresh oysters to the LOCATION community. We will be selling LIST OF PRODUCTS from TIME and DATE. To make sure our delicious oysters are available, we suggest ordering online in advance.

Farm/Landing Pick Up

The most important part of the farm pick-up option is ensuring you are available. Most customers do not understand that oyster grounds are typically not close to the landing and the workforce is out on the water. The best option is to pick specific days and times that an employee will be available to process farm pick up orders.

Farm pick-ups are typically for online orders, though it is suggested you have some extra on hand to sell to walk-up customers.

Example Copy

1. Did we mention we love meeting our customers? If you live in the area or just passing through, we offer our fresh oysters at our farm. Unless you farm them yourself, you won't get a more perfect oyster. Our farms pick up hours are: DAY OF WEEK and TIMES
2. In addition to our Regional Pick-up locations, we also offer order pick-up at our landing in LOCATION. Pick-up at our landing ensures you received the freshest possible oysters right out of the bay. Pick up at our farm is available DAY OF WEEK and TIMES

Storing and Consuming Live Oysters

Very few customers know how to store and consume live oysters safely. Most customers believe live oysters must be consumed immediately or make the dreaded mistake of keeping them in a sealed cooler. Additionally, some consumers see a "popped" live oyster as a bonus due to easier shucking. It is not.

Providing the customer recommended storing information builds consumer confidence, provides more flexibility when planning events, and builds consumer trust.

Storing

Most companies suggest storing oysters no longer than 3 days after arrival. Shipped oysters have often traveled long distances and, even in insulated packaging, have been exposed to temperature changes. The goal is for the customer to have a delightful experience and become a repeat buyer. Advise accordingly.

Example Copy

1. We recommend you enjoy your oysters upon arrival. However, live oysters can be stored in a chilled environment for up to NUMBER OF DAYS after arrival.

Refrigerator - To store live oysters in the refrigerator, place oysters in the coldest part of the refrigerator and cover with a damp towel to maintain moisture levels. Do not keep oysters in sealed containers or bags. Oysters are alive and need to breathe.

Cooler - To store oysters in a cooler, place oysters ON TOP of ice with drain plug open. Live oysters cannot tolerate freshwater and must not sit in ice-melt or freshwater. Do not store oysters in a sealed cooler, container, or bag. Oysters are alive and need to breathe.

Freezer - Freezing oysters does change the texture and flavor of the oyster. Oysters that are still in the shells should only be frozen live. Do not freeze oysters that have "popped" or expired during shipping. Place oysters in a plastic container or freezer bag, leaving ½-inch headspace, seal, and freeze.

2. To ensure the freshest and safest oyster experience, we recommend our oysters are consumed upon arrival. Though not recommended, our oyster may be stored according to the below instructions for up to 24 hours after arrival. Consumption after 24 hours may not be safe.

Refrigerator - To store live oysters in the refrigerator, place oysters in the coldest part of the refrigerator and cover with a damp towel to maintain moisture levels. Do not keep oysters in sealed containers or bags. Oysters are alive and need to breathe.

Cooler - To store oysters in a cooler, place oysters ON TOP of ice with drain plug open. Live oysters cannot tolerate freshwater and must not sit in ice-melt or freshwater. Do not store oysters in a sealed cooler, container, or bag. Oysters are alive and need to breathe.

Freezer - Freezing oysters does change the texture and flavor of the oyster. Oysters that are still in the shells should only be frozen live. Do not freeze oysters that have “popped” or expired during shipping. Place oysters in a plastic container or freezer bag, leaving ½-inch headspace, seal, and freeze.

Consuming Live Oysters

The customer needs guidance on safely consuming oysters. Even when oysters are consumed on the day of arrival, there can be expired oysters straight out of the shipping box. Providing simple guidance on spotting an expired oyster will build consumer trust and confidence in your oysters. Providing a “foodborne illness” warning is recommended.

Example Copy

1. Our oysters are fresh from the LOCATION OF OYSTER GROUNDS, handpicked for delivery on the day of shipping. However, even the freshest of oysters can “go bad” during shipping.

Before consuming, carefully inspect your oysters. Oysters that are not safe for consumption will have an open shell and/or be dry upon shucking; we call this a “popped” shell.

Once an oyster has expired, it can no longer maintain a tight seal causing the shell to open or “pop” and the oyster liquids to leak. Please discard any expired oysters; they are not safe for consumption.

2. *Consuming raw or undercooked shellfish may increase your risk of foodborne illness

Recap

Ecommerce businesses are here to stay. Consumers are increasingly sourcing and exploring premium meats and seafood online. Customers want providers and brands they can trust and rely on for consistent product and delivery. Incorporating the above information will help your company become the trusted brand for Virginia oysters.