

K.I.S.S. the Beach &

“Keep It Simple Sheller!”

A No-Nonsense, *Humorously, Serious* Guide to
Responsible Beachcombing & Shelling

On our

Florida Gulf Coast Beaches



By Jill Zaremba-Militzer



UF UNIVERSITY of
FLORIDA
IFAS Extension

Welcome to Florida!

Whether you're a tourist or resident, it's likely that at some time or another, you've enjoyed a beautiful Florida Gulf Coast Beach.

Sun, sand, shells... For some, it doesn't get any better than this. But, did you know that with great freedom on our Florida Gulf Coast Beaches comes great responsibility?

Gone are the days (thank goodness) of unregulated fishing, taking live shells, reckless littering, and a genuine un-awareness of the environmental issues impacting our precious coastal areas.

We need to be aware of how important it is for all of us to take an active role in caring for our entire Florida Gulf Coast System. We are more educated and know more than we ever have before about the fragile state our oceans and beaches are in.

We all have the power to throw our garbage away, be watchful of wildlife, and take notice when other people (who may not know any better) need gentle reminders to do the same. Florida Gulf Coast Beaches attract many tourists annually, as well as part time or permanent residents. There is so much to offer here and we all want a piece of the glorious pie! So, it isn't surprising that one of the biggest and most affordable activities drawing visitors in, is Beachcombing & Shelling.

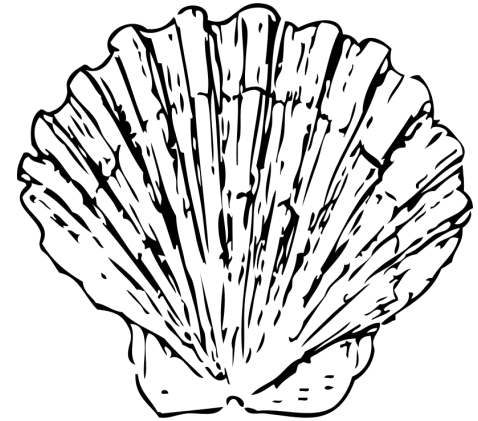


Shells make great gifts, décor, and jewelry! It is always fun to receive an authentic gift like a seashell, because it comes from such an amazing, seemingly mysterious resource, the ocean, *and they're free*, right?

Not really...

Monetarily yes, however they are not without significant value. Once a seashell is dormant, you may take it. But, one must realize the significance of not taking too much either. If we all took copious amounts of shells, then our beaches would be depleted very quickly of a significant resource to the overall health of our beaches, as well as containing important nutrients for coastal birds.

One cannot deny that *Shelling* is a pastime that is very popular on Florida Gulf Coast Beaches. People of all ages can be found hunched over, digging in the sand, gathering treasures from the sea. The feeling of Shelling is one of wistfully getting “lost in the moment,” when the whole world around you melts away into the sounds and smells of the beach while taking our cares out to sea... It can be a very personal time, or one shared with loved ones. Although this hobby exists seemingly without rules, there are in fact, basic rules of etiquette that do impact the overall health of the beach.



Please read over the following guidelines in relation to Shelling Etiquette. It's so important to know how to take care of our Florida Gulf Coast Beaches. We all want to enjoy “collectively collecting” and continuing to partake in one of the most satisfying activities oceanside... Beachcombing & Shelling!

And Remember...

Don't take life too seriously (after all you're at the beach!) But seriously... Do the right thing and take care of our Florida Gulf Coast Beaches.

Simple Beachcombing Etiquette *With A Twist Of Humor*

If It's Alive Leave It Alone, If It's Litter, Throw It Away

To be clear, it is strictly prohibited to take any seashells that have living animals inside of them, so gently put the inhabited shell back into the sand and move on. Oh, and if you think a little, tiny, piece of a juice box stuck in the beach won't make it into the ocean? Think again, there is something called a *tide*... So, do the right thing if you see trash when you are shelling, simply walk your bikini bottom over to the garbage can and drop it in... Easy-Peasy...

Save Some For Your Brother...

There *is* a limit as to how many seashells you can take from any given beach. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission states that you can take up to 20 organisms per person, per day. Kindergarten "trust" rules apply... let's enjoy our beach treasures, but we've got to limit our greediness too... nonny-nonny, boo-boo...

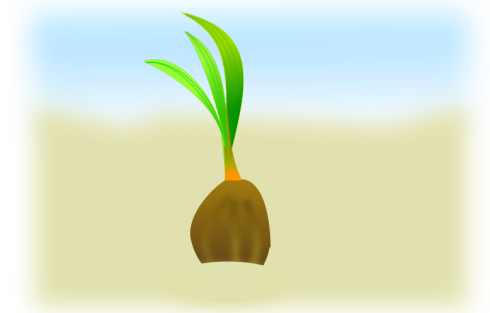
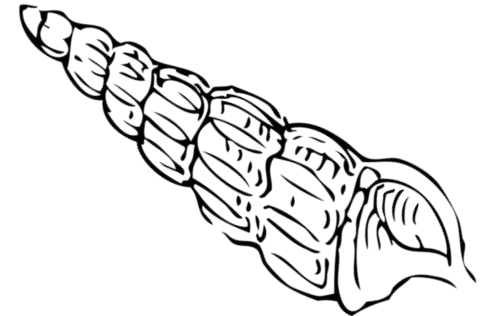
Don't Make Me Come Over There

We've all been there... It is a perfectly nice Sunday afternoon at the beach, our coolers are stocked, and we relax into our comfy chair, our thirsty skin soaking up essential vitamin D... When suddenly it happens! You hear the familiar scream... a child is running after a seagull with a stick and the kid means business...

Calling all guardians and parents! This is not cute, nor is it funny. If your children obviously know no better, teach them at that moment to be kind to every living thing, because ***taunting and teasing an animal is indeed a form of abuse.*** Your fellow beachgoers don't like it, and most importantly the animals don't... Enough said?

Step on a Crack?

Just so everyone is sure, without confusion... **PLEASE DO NOT WALK ON THE DUNES, SEAGRASS, OR VEGETATION OF ANY KIND.** *Thank You, The Management.* Even your bare feet can destroy coastal areas, which provide essential habitats for a variety of important beach critters as well as creating necessary barriers to prevent beach erosion. Please use the walkways and bridges provided, for dragging across all of your beach stash like noodles, chairs, umbrellas, and coolers...



In Case You Missed It Earlier...

Pick up your garbage! This includes but is not limited to; bottles, straws, toys, food, rubber bands, band-aids, toothpicks, pitch forks, regular forks, spoons, knives, serving spoons, spatulas (basically your entire utensil drawer at home and possibly what is in your garage) lip gloss, sun lotion, sunscreen (there's a difference) make-up, mirrors, newspapers, cigars...cigarettes... (Contrary to some people's beliefs... The beach isn't one big ashtray, and FYI, it isn't cool when birds eat cigarette butts either) pets, pet food, doggy-doo, doo of any kind, diapers (both used and unused, yes, it had to be clarified) coins, plastic ANYthing, the list is so incredibly long regarding plastic so to be clear.... ALL PLASTIC.

FACT: Sea turtles think a plastic bag floating in the water is a jellyfish. They actually ingest the whole thing, and then it sits in their gut making them think they are full, so they do *not* eat. It is cruel, and terrible, and the turtle dies a slow, painful death. Bottom line, if you can pick up one thing at the beach, PLEASE, PLEASE, pick-up the plastic...UG!

It's NOT For The Birds

You may *think* that it's cute, or okay to feed the birds on the beach, but it is SO NOT. Seabirds have their own special kind of diet, by feeding them cheesy-pooofs and scraps, you are only screwing up their digestive habits, AND making them aggressive, even stalking other beach goers (like little kids holding ice cream cones for example.) Not cool. Just think of how you would feel if, after Thanksgiving dinner... you're all bloated and uncomfortable, about to fall asleep on the couch, when your nephew suddenly dangles a very tasty last piece of crunchy turkey in front of your face. Are you gonna' snap at it? Bets are, probably yes, you will. Know why? Because it is too tempting and delicious, and you have developed a strong appetite at this point, and it's hard to say "no."

Please, don't make our seabirds be like us... Let them be birds, okay?



Yes, That's A Turtle Nest, So Leave It Alone

A designated turtle nest is indicated by; caution tape, signage, and/or wooden stakes to indicate an active area. A female Sea Turtle lays her eggs in a hole at a certain time of the year, digging out the sand with her flippers. The eggs are left essentially alone, and can take anywhere from six to eight weeks to mature. Hatchlings then find their way to the ocean's edge, oftentimes battling predators, and even humans who may get in their way. What an incredible gift to have these animals be so visually accessible while essentially creating new life, let's all celebrate this and give them their deserved privacy and protection! It is strictly prohibited to interfere with a turtle nest, or their journey into the ocean. Large fines, and in some cases, even jail time may apply, be aware!

Simple Shelling Etiquette *Time To Have Some Fun!*

Best Shelling Times

- *Low tide
- *After storms
- *After unusually strong tides.

Remember-do not touch without looking. Things that sting such as jellyfish commonly drift onto the beach.

Shelling Tools

- *Use a sifting bucket or netted bag for draining seawater more easily.
- *Use a plastic spade for digging.

Remember-you may only take up to 20 shells per person/per day.

How To Clean Dormant Sea Shells

- *50/50 bleach and water solution.
- *Use a soft toothbrush to remove any debris.
- *Rinse shells thoroughly in water.
- *Be extra careful cleaning fragile sand dollars, do not use bleach.
- *For a glossy shine, rub shells with mineral oil.

Remember-taking shells that are inhabited by living animals is strictly prohibited.



Prohibited Florida Gulf Coast Seashells (Cannot Take)

*All harvest of the Bahama Starfish

*Possession of the Queen Conch

Permitted Florida Gulf Coast Seashells (Can Take)

Ribbed Scallop Shell

Murex

Fan Shell

Florida Corinthium

Florida Whelk

Cats Eye

Baby Conch

Brown Cockle

Paper Whelk

Moon Shell

Coquina

Leafy Jewel Box

Sea Urchin

Angel Wings

Lettered Olive

Star Fish

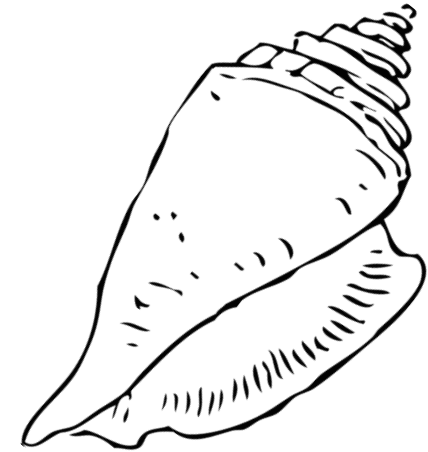
Worm Shell

Rams Horn

Sea Urchin Barbs

Florida Scallop

Calico Crab



Do not remove seeds or vegetation from the beach, they contribute to a healthy beach ecosystem. Here are some varieties you may see:

Red Mangrove Seed (Native to Florida)

Matchbox Bean (Native to Australia)

Bay Beans (Native to Florida)

Sea Pearls (Native to Florida)

Hamburger Beans/Mucuna Vine (Native to Central & South America)

Royal Poinciana (Native to Florida)

Sea Hearts/ Monkey's Ladder Vine (Native throughout the Tropics)

However, you can take shark teeth if you're lucky enough to find any. Here are some species of shark teeth you may see on the beach:

Tiger Shark
Sand Shark
Lemon Shark

Great White
Extinct Mako
Living Mako

Hammerhead

Look but don't touch! Never interact with shorebirds, simply appreciate their beauty from afar. Honor and protect them, and always report an injured bird to the (FWC) Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission ASAP! Here are a variety of native birds that grace the beaches of the Florida Gulf Coast:

Brown Pelican
Skimmer
Laughing Gull
Variety of Terns
Sandpiper
Ruddy Turnstone
Sanderling
Willet
Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs
Variety of Plovers
Greater Flamingo (Exotic & infrequently seen in Florida)
Scarlet Ibis (Exotic & Rare)



Happy beachcombing & keep it simple sheller!

Remember to ~

Be an advocate for our wildlife, and an active participant in keeping our coastal areas healthy.

Whether you're a visitor or resident, thank you for taking a peek at: **K.I.S.S. the Beach! & "Keep It Simple Sheller," A No-Nonsense, *Humorously, Serious* Guide to Responsible Beachcombing & Shelling ~ On our Florida Gulf Coast Beaches.** By Jill Zarembo-Miltzer.

Have fun in the sun, sand, and surf... Don't take life too seriously (after all you're at the beach!) But seriously... Do the right thing and take care of our Florida Gulf Coast Beaches.

Additional Resources:

UF/IFAS University of Florida
Florida Master Naturalist Program-Coastal Systems Module

www.masternaturalist.org

Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission

www.myfwc.com

The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum, Sanibel, Florida

www.shellmuseum.org



UF | UNIVERSITY of
FLORIDA
IFAS Extension