

### **Varnish clams (*Nuttallia obscurata*)**



The varnish clam – also known as the purple varnish clam, mahogany clam, or savory clam – is a nonnative species, originally from Asia. Varnish clams first showed up on British Columbia beaches in the early 1990s, and quickly spread to Washington. It is likely that they were introduced into North America via ballast water. Varnish clams are now commonly found in most areas of Puget Sound, generally inhabiting the upper third of the intertidal zone. They are particularly abundant near fresh water inputs. They are oval-shaped and

flattened, with a shiny brown coating (periostracum) on the outer surface of the shell; the interior of the shell is purple. Varnish clams can grow to about three inches in size, and are typically found buried deeper in the substrate than either Manila clams or native littlenecks. Unlike most other local clams, which are filter-feeders, varnish clams are both filter-feeders and deposit-feeders.

Varnish clams retain marine biotoxins such as Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) longer and at higher levels than other clams, so be sure to check the Department of Health's PSP hotline (1-800-562-5632) before harvesting.