



The scientific study of shells is conchology.

Seashells

Seashells are the exoskeletons of small invertebrate animals called mollusks. The shell is the outside skeleton that supports and protects the soft slippery body of the mollusk. Shells range in size from a grain of sand to four foot, five hundred pound clam of the South Pacific Ocean. Some have beautiful shapes and bright colors while others are plain and colorless. Mollusk shells can be divided into five groups.

Univalve
(Gastropoda)

Single shell shaped as a cone or coiled in a spiral, one chamber inside



Two matching shells that move on hinges that look like small teeth

Bivalve
(Pelecypoda)



Tooth shells
(Scaphopoda)

Hollow tubes that curve slightly at one end



Octopus & Squid
(Cephalopoda)

Shell inside body or no shell or chambered shell



Chiton
(Amphineura)

Eight separate plates hinged together, attach to rocks



All seashells have three layers - outer, middle, and inner. The shell is made of a mineral called calcium carbonate. The mollusk gets the minerals it needs to make its shell from the food it eats. The blood stream carries the minerals to a tissue called the mantle. Glands in the mantle produce the shell as a liquid. Other glands make a hardening material and the color patterns of the shell. Most mollusks enlarge their shell as they grow.