



Freshwater Mussel

Freshwater Mussels are *bivalves*. This means they have two valves (shells) hinged together that are typically closed when you find them.

What they look like

Mussels have thick shells. Some are oblong-shaped, while others are rounded. They have a muscular foot that they use to burrow into the bottom of rivers. When they are feeding, the gills sort the particles from the water flowing into the shell.

Where they live

Freshwater Mussels live on the bottom of rivers, irrigation canals and farm dams. Some can survive extended periods of drying out, by burrowing in the mud and closing their shell. Mussels with smooth shells are usually found in muddy or sandy areas in streams or lakes. The smooth shell makes it easier to move through mud or sand. Mussels with bumps or knobs on their shells are found in gravel (rocks the size of marbles) on the bottom of fast streams. The bumps and knobs help anchor the mussel in the gravel.

What they eat

Freshwater Mussels live on microscopic animals and plants. They feed and breathe by sucking water through tubes, called siphons, to filter out food particles.

Pollution tolerance

 Tolerant, rating 3

Freshwater Mussels do not occur in badly polluted rivers. Bivalves accumulate toxic chemicals in their tissues. These chemicals may be present in the water in low concentrations.

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Pollution tolerance	Very sensitive	Sensitive	Tolerant	Very tolerant
Size	From 40 - 180 mm across longest diameter			

What's interesting about the Freshwater Mussel?

- Many species live 20-30 years, some up to 140 years. Scientists can tell how old a mussel is by counting the ridges or year stripes on its shell as mussels have a different eating or growing speed in winter.
- The sexes are separate in most species but some mussels have both male and female reproductive systems.

Where they fit in

Phylum Mollusca > **Class** Bivalvia > **Order** Eulamellibranchia > **Family** (Three Australian families): Hyriidae; Corbiculidae; Sphaeriidae

