

When and where should I shell?

Here are some general guidelines that may guide your adventures on the beaches of Sanibel and Captiva Islands:

1. Low tide: About an hour before to an hour after low tide is usually optimal.
2. Full moons and new moons: This is when the gravitational force of the moon creates higher high tides and lower low tides than normal.
3. After a good northwest wind or a storm. These events tend to stir up the ocean bottom and make more shells more available for the next tide.
4. A.M. low tides are often better than P.M. low tides: Many of the mollusks are nocturnal, or feed at night; therefore the shells are more available in the morning.

There is really no “best” shelling beach. Winds, currents, and tides determine the treasure.

Please remember that **THERE IS NO LIVE SHELLING** in Lee County (and that includes the echinoderms: sand dollars, sea urchins, and sea stars). Just because an animal is washed ashore **DOES NOT** always mean it is dead. Living sand dollars will be dark brown in color and fuzzy in appearance. Living sea stars will generally move their legs or tube feet if picked up. Living sea urchins can move each individual spine when picked up so look closely and carefully. When in doubt please return the animal to the water.

Please keep in mind that all artificial outdoor lighting, including flashlights, is banned during sea turtle nesting season from May 1 to November 1. Loggerhead and green sea turtles return annually to lay their eggs on our beaches, and light disorient their baby hatchlings away from the water.