Wild Celery and Freshwater Mussels

Wild Celery, scientific name *Vallisneria Americana,* and a type of freshwater mussel called Eastern Elliptio, scientific name *Elliptio complanata*, live in this tank. They are often found in the same areas of the Chesapeake Bay.

Mussels, like oysters, are bivalves. Bivalves have two shells and belong to the mollusk family of animals. Animals in this family have hard exterior shells that protect their soft inner bodies. Eastern Elliptio mussels grow to up to 5 inches across. They are an important food source for otters and muskrats.

Wild celery has long, flat, ribbon-like leaves that can grow to about 5 feet long. The leaves have a light green stripe running down the center and grow in a cluster from the base of the plant which is white. Wild celery is important to the ecosystem of the Chesapeake Bay for a number of reasons. It is an important source of both food and shelter for ducks, and other birds, fish and mammals as well as for invertebrates. Like all plants, wild celery is also an important source of oxygen, produced when the plants photosynthesize.

Both wild celery and Eastern Elliptio mussels can survive in a wide range of conditions. They both tolerate fairly murky, or turbid, waters. Eastern Elliptio mussels filter particles, nutrients, and algae as they feed and thus help to clean the water. Wild celery uses dissolved nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, for growth which helps limit algal blooms. Wild celery can also withstand wave action better than most other underwater bay grass species and its roots help reduce erosion.