

This Month



Sugar Kelp

Colloquial Nickname: Kelp
 Scientific name: *Laminaria saccharina*

Field Markings: A long, thick seaweed, brown to yellow-green in color; blades may be ruffled along the edges

Size: averages 3 to 6 feet long

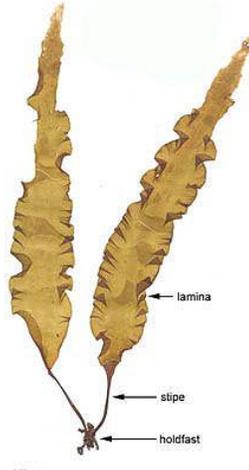
Habitat: Exposed shores, open water, tide pools attached to rocks. Commonly found in clumps along high-tide line of the coast.

Seasonal Appearance: Year-round

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES AND BEHAVIORS

Kelp is a brown seaweed, usually brown to yellow green in color. There are many species of kelp including the giant kelp beds of the Pacific, but sugar kelp is the species common to Narragansett Bay.

Resembling lasagna noodles, the blades are ribbon-like, usually several feet long, but can grow up to ten feet. Kelp does not have true roots anchored in the sediment; instead it attaches itself to rocks and shells by a holdfast - a strong rootlike structure that serves as an anchor. The holdfast keeps kelp from being washed ashore during heavy wave action, although in very strong storms, the plant will often break at the stem, washing ashore and leaving



the holdfast still attached to the rock.

Some types of kelp have a hollow midrib or tiny air bladders in the blades that allow the plant to float up in the water column. Kelp obtains nutrients from the water through pores in its blades, unlike terrestrial plants that get nutrients through a root system.

Kelp is primarily a subtidal plant, but is often found on rocks in the intertidal zone during low tide. Sugar kelp and edible kelp (*Alaria esculentia*) can be found along the New England coast.

Another common species of kelp in Narragansett Bay is fingered kelp (*Laminaria digitata*), distinguishable by many finger-like blades extending from the holdfast.

RELATIONSHIP TO PEOPLE

Sugar kelp is related to the kelps of the Pacific Ocean that can reach lengths of over 100 feet. Both forms are used as soil fertilizer.

The “sacchar” in *saccharina* means sugar. Because they are particularly rich in vitamin C, kelp blades can be ground up and used as salt or vitamin supplements. The midrib of kelp is often used in salads or made into candy. A high demand for kelp has caused restrictions on harvesting to protect the species.

HOW TO GET YOUR OWN COPY

RISAA members can purchase their own copy of *The Uncommon Guide To Common Life on Narragansett Bay* for \$15 from the RISAA Merchandise Committee. Stop by the committee table at any monthly RISAA meeting.



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