



SARGASSUM AND YOU



What is Sargassum? Where does it come from? *Sargassum* is a brown, free-floating macroalgae. Historically, sargassum bloomed in what scientists called the 'Sargasso Sea' and provides essential habitat to hundreds of marine species.

Has it always been here? Is it changing? While sargassum is a natural occurrence, 2011 saw a **new** bloom from the Amazon River mouth that now washes up in abundance on Caribbean coastlines. These blooms have continued yearly since.

So, what is that smell? When sargassum gets washed ashore it begins to decompose. Rotting sargassum takes in oxygen and releases hydrogen sulfide. Hydrogen sulfide has a very unpleasant rotten egg odor.

Is hydrogen sulfide harmful? Breathing in hydrogen sulfide may cause irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat/lungs of people who come in close contact with degrading sargassum. Those with asthma may be even more sensitive. **The best way** to protect yourself and your family from harmful sargassum fumes is by avoiding beaches with heavy amounts of rotting sargassum.

Is it safe to swim with? *Sargassum* itself is harmless and safe to swim with. However, small creatures like jellyfish that live in the sargassum might cause skin irritation if touched.



RILEY CHAMPINE, NGM STAFF SOURCE: BRIAN LAPOINTE, FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

**Department of Planning and Natural Resources
Division of Fish and Wildlife**

<https://dpnr.vi.gov/fish-and-wildlife/>



facebook.com/VIDPNR



SARGASSUM ON OUR SHORES



Sargassum occurs naturally and is an important habitat and food source for wildlife.

Sargassum stabilizes shorelines and reduces erosion.

The best course of action is to leave the sargassum alone, let nature run its course, and use beaches that are less affected.



When beached in high amounts, it decays and puts off a rotten egg smell.

Manual removal by hand raking is allowed for nuisance sargassum that cannot be avoided.

Beachfront businesses may seek a permit from the Division of Fish and Wildlife and the Division of Coastal Zone Management to remove sargassum with machinery in extreme cases.



Sargassum can cover and hide sea turtle nests. Take care to avoid disturbing them and report any stranding incidents to the Division of Fish and Wildlife or STAR.

**Department of Planning and Natural Resources
Division of Fish and Wildlife**

<https://dprn.vi.gov/fish-and-wildlife/>



facebook.com/VIDPNR



SARGASSUM IN OUR WATERS



Sargassum occurs naturally in the Sargasso Sea and is a thriving ecosystem.

While floating on the surface, sargassum provides food and shelter for sea turtles and hatchlings that aren't strong swimmers yet, juvenile crabs, shrimp, jacks, and mahi-mahi.

Some species are found only in sargassum - like the Sargassum Fish!



Sargassum can be hazardous to motor boats. If caught, put the motor in reverse to detangle.

A Division of Fish and Wildlife permit is required to remove sargassum.

An Army Corps of Engineers permit is required to deploy booms to limit movement of sargassum.



Department of Planning and Natural Resources
Division of Fish and Wildlife

<https://dprn.vi.gov/fish-and-wildlife/>



facebook.com/VIDPNR

Sargassum Fish
A. H. Baldwin
"The Bahama Islands"



What is Sargassum?

What is Sargassum? Where does it come from?

Sargassum is a brown, free-floating macro-algae that occurs naturally in temperate and tropical waters. It originates in the Sargasso Sea, an area located in the North Atlantic Subtropical Gyre. The Sargasso Sea is the only sea without land boundaries, and is instead bounded by currents.

Benefits to wildlife?

While floating on the surface, sargassum provides food and shelter for sea turtles and hatchlings that aren't strong swimmers yet, juvenile crabs, shrimp, jacks, and mahi-mahi. When washed ashore, sargassum and all its microorganisms provide a nutrient dense food source for shorebirds and land crabs.

Benefits to shorelines?

On beaches, sargassum provides a protective buffer on shorelines from wind and wave energy. This benefit protects beaches by preventing erosion and stabilizing the sand on which humans and wildlife structurally depend on.

Has it always been here? Is it changing?

While sargassum has always been a natural occurrence, 2011 saw an explosion of the seaweed from the mouth of the Amazon River moving north through the Caribbean to the African coast. Since then, similar "golden tides" have occurred.

Fun Fact

Sargassum provides essential habitat for an amazing variety of species, some of which are only found in Sargassum, like the Sargassum Fish!

So, why does it smell? Is it harmful? Is it safe to swim with?

When sargassum decomposes and the microorganisms break down the organic matter, it takes in oxygen and releases hydrogen sulfide, resulting in a rotten egg smell.

Sargassum Research?

The large sargassum pileups we are seeing now are the result of increasing nutrient run off from the Amazon and Orinoco rivers. This can be linked back to deforestation of the Amazon Rainforest and expansion of agricultural land. A 'Floating Algae Index' can be referenced for up-to-date information on sargassum:

https://www.caricoos.org/oceans/observation/modis_aqua/ECARIBE/afai?locale=en



**Department of Planning and Natural Resources
Division of Fish and Wildlife**

<https://dprn.vi.gov/fish-and-wildlife/>

