

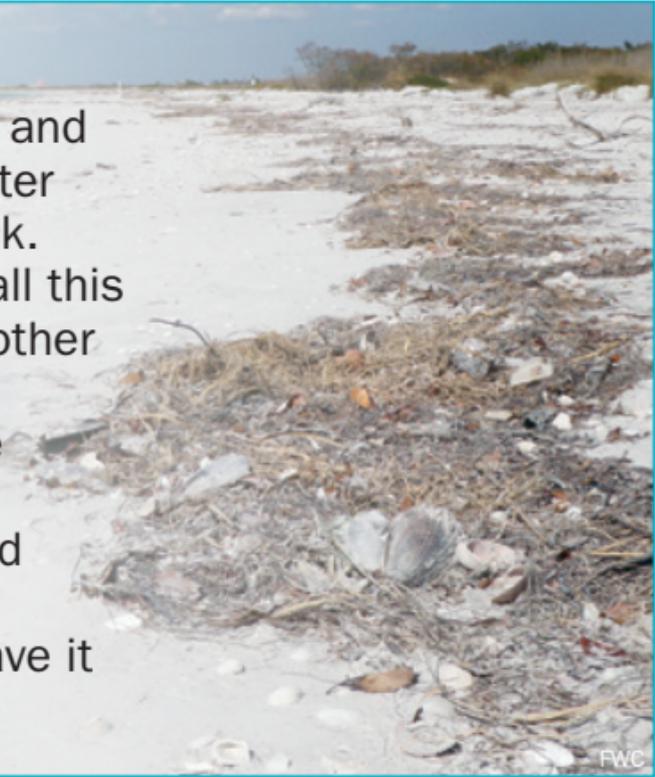


Beach Wrack ID Guide



What is beach wrack?

Anything washed ashore and found above the high water line is called beach wrack. Most people generally call this seaweed, but there are other interesting things in the wrack that help keep the beach alive and stable. The wrack serves as food and shelter for wildlife, and it is important to leave it on Florida beaches.



FWC





How do I use this guide?



You can use this guide to go on a scavenger hunt — find and identify plants and animals found in beach wrack, and discover a wealth of natural treasures that wash in from the sea. However, there are a few items you should not touch or remove (indicated here by ). There are many other plants and animals that you may find in addition to those listed here, so keep looking!



Macroalgae (Seaweed)



Sargassum



Graceful Redweed





Sargassum:

Golden when fresh, turns dark brown on the beach; has many round air bladders that look like berries

Fun Fact: Sargassum drifts on Gulf and Atlantic currents and ends up in the Sargasso Sea in the center of an ocean-spanning vortex.

Graceful Redweed:

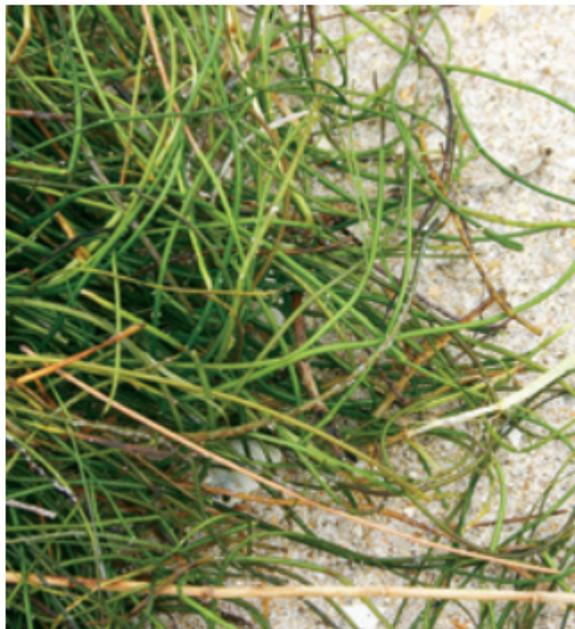
Greenish to bright red forked branches; quickly bleaches clear

Fun Fact: Red algae have a photosynthetic pigment that reflects red light and absorbs blue light, allowing them to live in deeper water than green plants.

Seagrasses



Turtle Grass



Manatee Grass





Turtle Grass:

Green or brown when dead; ribbon-like flat blades

Fun Fact: Turtle grass is the most common Caribbean seagrass and the largest Florida seagrass. It is also one of the few marine plants that has flowers.

Manatee Grass:

Forms white tubules when dead; 1-2 in. long, less than 1/8 in. wide

Fun Fact: Manatee grass is the second most common seagrass in Florida waters and is a favorite food of its namesake, the manatee.

Sea Beans



Hamburger
Bean



Sea
Heart



Mangrove
Propagule





Hamburger Bean:

Plump disk with thick black band around the middle

Fun Fact:

Hamburger beans come from rainforest vines of the American tropics and the West Indies.

Sea Heart:

Circular or heart-shaped; glossy purple-brown or dark mahogany

Fun Fact:

Sea hearts come from the monkey ladder vine from the rainforests of Central and South America.

Mangrove

Propagule:

Long, cigar-shaped; green or brown

Fun Fact:

Propagules come from the red mangrove tree, which lives in saline areas of the American tropics.

Sponges



**Golfball
Sponge**



**Redbeard
Sponge**



**Sheepswool
Sponge**



**Golfball Sponge:**

Yellow to brown sphere with distinct pores

Fun Fact:

Sponges are simple animals that filter up to 10,000 times their own volume of seawater each day.

Redbeard Sponge:

Slim, velvety, red branches

Fun Fact:

Redbeard sponges are used in labs to study how separated cells can reassemble into a whole organism.

Sheepswool Sponge:

Soft, brown, classic bath sponge

Fun Fact:

Sheepswool sponges were commercially harvested in Florida from the late 19th century until the middle of the 20th century.

Cnidarians



Sea
Whip



Moon
Jelly



Portuguese
Man O' War





Sea Whip:

Soft coral with whip-like branches; purple, red, orange, or yellow

Fun Fact: Soft corals are colonies of tiny polyps, each with 8 tentacles.

Moon Jelly:

Large, clear, with pink, clover leaf shaped gland in the bell

Fun Fact: Like all cnidarians, moon jellies have stinging cells which cause a burning sensation when touched.



Portuguese Man O' War:

Brilliant blue with pink-crested sail and trailing tentacles which can sting even when dead

Warning:
DO NOT TOUCH!



Mollusks (Shells)



Heart
Cockle



Pen
Shell



Sunray
Venus Clam





Heart Cockle:

Large; cream with brown or tan in segments along its shell ribs

Fun Fact: Heart cockles, also known as giant cockles, can come from deep in the sea — sometimes up to 100 feet!

Pen Shell:

Very large black or brown shell with pearly interior

Fun Fact: Many living pen shells have pale, soft-bodied pen shrimp living inside.

Sunray Venus Clam:

Large, pearly smooth shells with radiating bands of color

Fun Fact: The sunray venus clam is eaten by gulls and is also used to make chowder.

Arthropods



Beach-
hopper



White Beach
Tiger Beetle



Ghost
Crab



**Beachhopper:**

Sand-colored, hump-backed, looks like a flea; bounces when the wrack is disturbed

Fun Fact:

Beachhoppers are not insects, and they do not bite.

White Beach Tiger Beetle:

pearly-colored; long legs; large eyes; makes short flights

Fun Fact: These beetles are insects that eat beachhoppers and other things in the wrack.

Ghost Crab:

Pale square body with yellowish legs; large eyestalks; can run fast

Fun Fact: Some ghost crabs can change colors to match their surroundings over the course of several hours.

More Arthropods



Blue
Crab



Horseshoe
Crab



Mole
Crab





Blue Crab:

Greenish and blue; mostly discarded molts found; pointed projections on the sides; do not pick up if alive

Fun Fact: Blue crabs are swift predators that eat mollusks, fish and other crabs.



Horseshoe Crab:

Large U-shaped head, pointed tail spine; mostly discarded molts found

Fun Fact:

Horseshoe crabs have blue blood, which is harvested for medical use.

Mole Crab:

1.5 inches, teardrop-shaped, mottled green-gray; tan above, white below

Fun Fact: Mole crabs are used as bait when fishing for whiting and pompano.

Echinoderms



Sand Dollar



Short-spined Urchin





Sand Dollar:

Brown and prickly when alive — can secrete a yellow liquid which will stain clothing and skin; should only be picked up when dead and bleached white

Fun Fact: Sand dollars, like other echinoderms, have tiny tube feet all over their bodies. Their notches and holes help them sink into the sand.

Short-spined Urchin:

Leaves behind a shell called a “test” that is green when fresh and white when sun-bleached

Fun Fact: These urchins adorn themselves with bits of shell and algae — held on with their tube feet — which may help protect them from UV light.

Chordates



Leathery Sea Squirt



Sea Pork





Leathery Sea Squirt:

Looks like a wrinkled potato; has 4 lobes around a siphon that squirts when squeezed

Fun Fact: Sea squirts have a lot in common with humans, although it may not look like it. They have traits that we exhibit during early development, such as a rigid cartilage backbone, called a notochord.

Sea Pork:

Rubbery, looks like salt pork; has a flattened side with several lobes; white, pink, yellow, green, red, purple

Fun Fact: Sea pork is actually a colony of tiny tunicate animals individually known as zooids. They are eaten by tulip snails, stingrays and sea turtles.

Vertebrates



Mermaid's Purse



Sea Turtle Hatching





Mermaid's Purse:

Egg cases of sharks, skates and rays; black, with four thread-like extensions

Fun Fact: Egg cases that wash up on the beach are usually empty because the young have already hatched out. You can tell if the yolk and embryo are still inside by holding it up to the sunlight.

Sea Turtle Hatchling:

Loggerheads, green turtles, and hawksbills

DO NOT pick up sea turtle hatchlings — they are protected, and it is illegal to disturb them! To report stranded hatchlings, call the FWC Wildlife Alert Number:
888-404-FWCC

Fun Fact: Hatchlings emerge July-October.



More Vertebrates — Shorebirds



Ruddy Turnstone



Sanderling





Ruddy Turnstone:

Stocky with orange legs and dark, wedge-shaped bill; in winter, white below with brownish head, bib and back; when breeding, black and white head, white belly, black bib and rusty red back and wings

Fun Fact: Ruddy turnstones earn their name by flicking aside beach wrack that may hide tasty invertebrates.



Sanderling:

May be found probing for mole crabs; in winter, pale-gray above and white below; in summer, rusty on the back, head and breast.

Fun Fact: Sanderlings migrate in spring to nest in the Arctic tundra.



Be careful not to disturb birds – they need time to feed and rest. Disturbance includes getting too close or causing them to fly. For additional information about shorebirds, visit flshorebirdalliance.org and myfwc.com/shorebirds.

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