



Fast Facts

GREEN SEA URCHINS IN MAINE



Colorful Creatures: Green sea urchins are not always green; their color can vary from dark green to purple or even reddish, depending on their environment and diet.

Ecosystem Engineers: Green sea urchins play a crucial role in their ecosystem by grazing on algae. This helps maintain the balance of marine habitats, particularly kelp forests.



Spiny Protection: The spines of green sea urchins can be up to 3 inches long and serve as a defense mechanism against predators like crabs and fish.

Unique Mouth: Known as "Aristotle's lantern," the green sea urchin has a specialized mouth with five tooth-like structures that allow it to scrape algae and other food off rocks.



Slow Movers: While they have the ability to move, green sea urchins are generally slow and use their tube feet to walk, often relying on ocean currents to help them travel.

Culinary Delights: In Maine, green sea urchins are harvested during the winter months for their roe, which is considered a delicacy and is often used in sushi and other dishes.





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Lifespan: Green sea urchins can live for 30 years or more in the wild, making them long-lived members of the benthic community.

Habitat: Green sea urchins are typically found in shallow waters, often on rocky substrates where they can easily access algal food sources.



Reproductive Spectacle: Green sea urchins participate in mass spawning events, releasing their gametes into the water where fertilization occurs externally. In Maine, spawning occurs in the spring.

Indicator Species: Because they are sensitive to environmental changes, green sea urchins are often used as indicator species to monitor the health of marine ecosystems.



Nature's Armor: Green sea urchins cleverly cover themselves with rocks, shells, and algal fragments, providing protection from harmful UV light and mechanical damage caused by wave surge.

Aggregating Behavior: Green sea urchins are often found in groups, sometimes forming dense aggregations, which can enhance their feeding efficiency and provide protection from predators.

