



Cabrillo
Marine
Aquarium



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SEA URCHIN

Fun Facts

In Greek, the name sea urchin means “*sea hedgehog*” and refers to the moveable spines that cover most of the urchin’s body.

THERE ARE ABOUT 700 DIFFERENT TYPES OF URCHINS WORLD-WIDE.

Bits of food that land on the urchin’s back can be easily passed down to the mouth, via its *tube feet*, very similar to a “*bucket brigade*”.

Just for Laughs

Q. What did the Atlantic Ocean say to the Pacific Ocean?

A. Nothing, it just waved.

Q. Is it true, that some sea urchins are venomous?

A. Yes, some species of sea urchin like the tropical Fire urchin have *venomous* spines that can inflict a considerable amount of pain and discomfort if a swimmer or diver is unfortunately stung.

Q. Are there male & female urchins?

A. Yes, urchins are either male or female & *spawning* occurs directly in the sea. Male & female gametes are released through 5 *gonopores* at the top of the urchin’s body. Several-million tiny, jelly-coated eggs will develop into tiny larvae and after several months they will grow into juvenile urchins. It can take 2-5 years for the urchin to reach reproductive maturity.

Q. Does an urchin have a hard shell?

A. Yes, the shell of an urchin is called a *test*. It is made up of hard plates split into 5 main parts, called the *Aristotle’s lantern*.

At CMA

Check out the
Purple urchins in
Tanks # 1, 3, 6
and at our
Touch Tank
where you can see
their spines move!

Q. How does an urchin eat?

A. Using its five sharp teeth that come together like a beak in the middle of its underside, the urchin will often scrape *algae* off the coral reef and rocks . Urchins are *voracious* grazers, continually eating away at seaweed & other marine algae.

Q. Do urchins have eyes?

A. Urchins have no visible eyes, but use their *tube feet* and spines to move across hard surfaces to find their next meal.

Q. Can the urchin regenerate a missing spine?

A. Yes, it can grow new spines if it loses one.

Fast Facts on a Local Species

Common name: Purple sea urchin

Scientific name: *Strongylocentrotus purpuratus*

Range: British Columbia to Baja California

Size: up to 4inches in diameter

Diet: algae, seaweed, and bits of plants & animals

Life cycle: egg to larva, juvenile to adult

Average lifespan: some can live over twenty years

Natural predators: sea stars, wolf eels, fish, sea otters & birds

Relatives: sea stars, sea cucumbers, sand dollars and sea lilies