

Turn seaweed into eye-catching pieces of art

By Amanda C. Treher
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When most people think of seaweed, they remember the slimy, creepy, icky stuff that wraps around their legs in the ocean. There is so much to like about seaweed, a common name used to describe algae with a plant-like appearance.

Seaweed is incorporated in many cuisines around the world, commonly consumed by Americans in sushi. It is used as a fertilizer, and a thickener in shampoos and conditioners. It is a component of many organic makeup products and is said to tone and increase blood circulation of the skin. Marine plants, including seaweed, are estimated to produce up to 80 percent of the oxygen in the atmosphere. These few examples show the importance of seaweed for the environment and for humans. However, the beauty of algae is a bit underappreciated. Pressed, dried and framed, seaweed makes elegant, simple and tremendously eye-catching pieces of artwork.

Species of seaweed are found in three groups of algae: green, red, and brown. Algae lack a vascular structure i.e., phloem and xylem, used for transport of water and nutrients found in the more familiar plants around us. They still rely on photosynthesis to provide food for their cells. Algae can be unicellular or multicellular and range in size from microscopic to 200 feet in length, in the case of the giant kelp that grows off the coast of California.

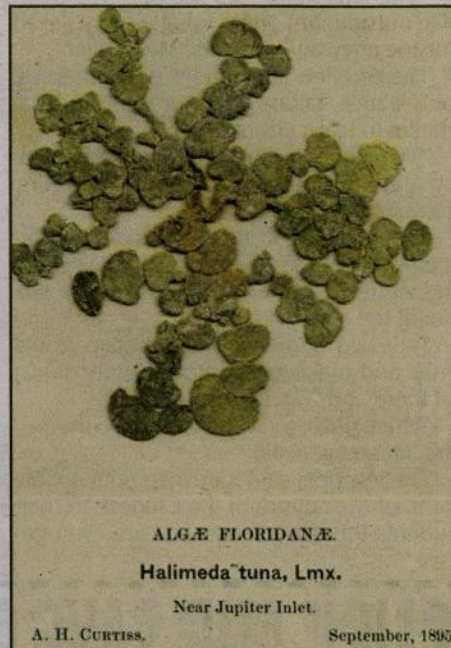
Scientific studies of algae often rely on preserved specimens. Traditionally, algal specimens have been incorporated into herbarium collections because of their close relation to vascular plants. The Claude E. Phillips Herbarium at Delaware State University has a small algae collection of approximately 300 specimens. Interestingly, many of these specimens were collected in the late 1800s along the coast of Florida and the Florida Keys.

Location and date of collection are recorded on scientific specimens. The method of pressing and drying seaweed on paper has provided scientists with hundreds of years worth of specimens to study. This same preservation technique can be easily learned by anyone to create scientific specimens or beautiful note cards and wall hangings. Crafting and scrapbooking with seaweed is not a new hobby, as it was quite popular during the Victorian era.

The following items are necessary to make your own seaweed specimens: freshwater, clear-drying acid-free glue, a baking pan, wax paper, acid-free rag paper or watercolor paper, newspaper or absorbent paper, cardboard, and a plant press or a source of heavy weight (books, bricks, etc.) to press the seaweed and paper.

Place a piece of paper into the baking pan and submerge the paper under an inch or less of water. Place a piece of seaweed on top of the paper; add or remove water to increase control over the specimen. Adjust and arrange the seaweed using your fingers or a tool. Very slowly lift the paper and seaweed together out of the water. Dirt can be removed with a damp piece of cloth. Allow

Garden Tales



ALGÆ FLORIDANÆ.

Halimeda tuna, Lmx.

Near Jupiter Inlet.

A. H. CURTISS.

September, 1895.

Submitted photos

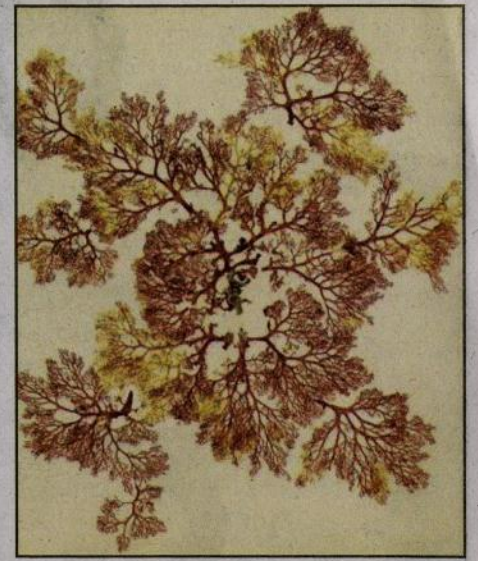
Specimen of *Halimeda tuna*, collected by A.H. Curtiss in 1895 near the Jupiter Inlet of Florida. The flattened calcified segments of this species give it a coral-like appearance.

the specimen to drip dry for several minutes before covering with wax paper. Put a few pieces of newspaper above and below the specimen, followed by several pieces of cardboard above and below.

Apply as much weight as possible to these layers or put in a plant press. A fan will expedite drying, but it is even more helpful to exchange the newspaper and cardboard every 12 to 24 hours until the paper and seaweed are dry. It may take three to four days for your specimen to dry completely. An alternative would be to use a phone book, which should also be replaced during drying. If the seaweed does not stick on its own after drying, a small amount of clear-drying acid-free glue can be applied. These specimens can be framed for a wall hanging, cut down into note cards, or incorporated into scrapbooks. When accompanied by the location and date of collection, these specimens also have scientific value, as a record of where and when a species occurred.

With seaweed afloat all around, the summer beach vacation is a perfect time to pick up this new hobby. This century-old pastime brings attention to the beauty of this fascinating group of organisms.

Editor's note: On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call 302-857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the herbarium, and e-mail amanda.treher@gmail.com (Amanda Treher, M.S. Graduate Student) for more information about this article.



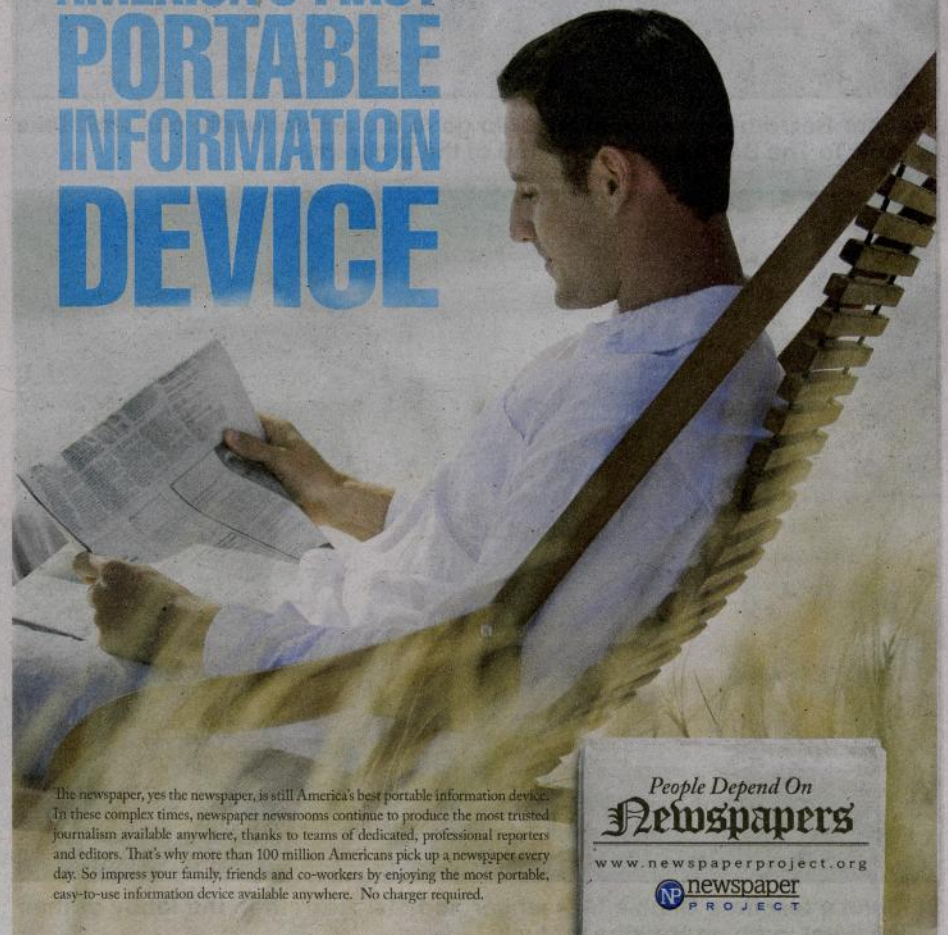
Two pages from Mrs. Rumford's scrapbook of algae collected on Appledore Island, Maine in 1866.

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